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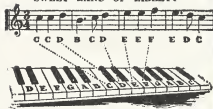
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December, 1943

Vol. XLIX, No. 1

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It seems as if that murderer is the only sane man in a town full of lunatics.
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Cover by Jerome Rozen

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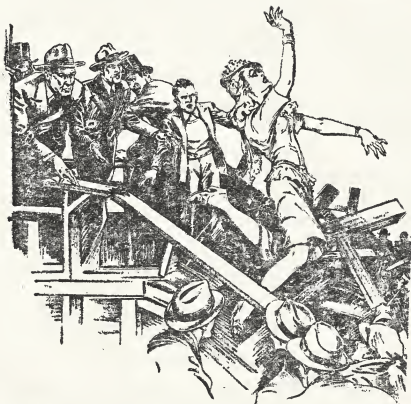
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Death on the Ways

By W. T. Ballard



Things looked tough for Detective Tim Herbert when the lady he was protecting was liquidated at that ship launching. For there were some who thought Tim owned shares of that guilt-edged deed and were determined to pay him his dividend in blood.

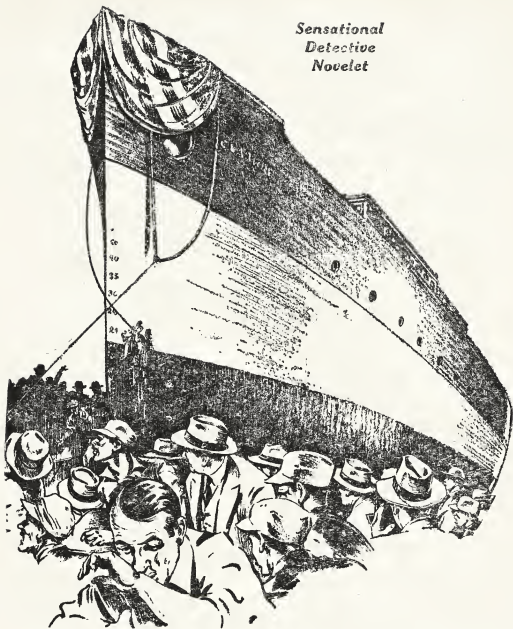
CHAPTER I

JERRY KOHUNE was working at Southwestern Ship, bucking rivets. It would have surprised a lot of his friends if they had known, for Jerry had once been one of the biggest directors in motion pictures.

A lot of guys who were big shots in one line or another are now in the labor gangs that are turning out the ships, the planes and guns.

This Kohune was large, around fifty. He'd come up the hard way in the picture business and it was nothing new for him to work with his hands.

*Sensational
Detective
Novelet*



I rather liked him. Not that he and I moved in the same league when he'd been in pictures, but we'd known each other. He was glad to see me walk into the joint, for he'd been at a small table, having a beer by himself.

"How's crime?" he asked.

I shrugged. "It still doesn't pay much. I'm just stalling while the

Army makes up its mind where to use me."

"They should be able to use you in the M. P.'s," he said. "Aren't you Hollywood's favorite detective?"

"Lay off." I wasn't feeling like kidding. "Your wife sent me down to see you, Jerry."

He laughed. "What's she want, part of my pay envelope? Tell her I

said to take a running jump at herself. If she wants any shipyard dough, she'll have to come down here and earn it herself. I've given her the last cent I ever will."

I didn't blame him much. In the days when he'd made large money, his wife, her brother and the son had spent it high, wide and handsome.

When Jerry hit the skids, they'd quit him like a dirty shirt. I don't know how much they had cached away, but from the little I'd seen, they didn't seem to be feeling any pain.

"She doesn't want any dough," I said. "She doesn't want anything except for you to let her alone."

His big good-looking face twisted into a scowl. "She needn't worry. I want no part of her. I haven't seen her for a year and it's not likely that I will see her. We don't move in the same set any more."

He glanced around the cheap beer hall, his eyes getting a little dreamy as if he was thinking of the old days when he had been known as one of Hollywood's more active playboys.

"You'll see her," I told him. "She's coming down to the shipyard tomorrow. She doesn't want you to speak if you should happen to meet."

His mouth tightened. "Tell her not to worry. I won't talk. I'd hate to have the boys on my crew know that I'd been married to such a woman. What's she going to do at the yards anyhow, sell bonds?"

"She's going to christen one of the new Liberty ships," I explained. "One of her great-grandfathers was an admiral or something. It's being named for him. I don't know much about it and I didn't want this job, but dough is dough, so I'm working for her at the moment. Come on, let's get tight and forget her." I turned and ordered a couple more beers.

I'D NEVER seen a ship being launched before, except in the movies. It was quite a sight. I was glad I'd come.

If more people could visit a yard and see the speed with which the boys and girls are turning out the ships, it might have a good effect on the whole country.

The crowd that showed up for the launching was impressive. There were newsreel cameras, shipyard officials, naval officers, reporters and such.

A little platform had been built at the head of the ways on which the big freighter squatted. Laura Kohune was at the front of the platform beside a couple of officials. Her son, her brother, and I stood in the background.

Her brother was a slight man with black hair and a close-clipped mustache. He was a press agent, publicist they're calling them nowadays. His nephew looked more like his uncle than he did like Jerry. He was slight, his hair was dark, and he had a nervous way of glancing across his shoulder as if he constantly expected to be followed.

I was there on business. Laura had hired me a couple of days before. She'd said that she wanted me to find something for her, but she hadn't told me what. I suspected that she merely wanted a bodyguard, because it made her feel important to be followed around by a man with a gun. There didn't seem to be any other reason.

But I had no time to think about myself. There was too much going on around me. Speeches over the portable mike, pictures of Laura, of the officials, and of the crowd, then Laura gripped the neck of the bottle of wine and swung it, cracking it hard in a little burst of white puffy foam against the ship.

As if from the slight impact, the ship began to move. For a moment the motion was slow, then as if seized by an eagerness to get into the water, its speed increased.

I was watching the ship so that I did not see what happened until the shout, then my eyes came down and

I was horrified, for a slender piece of wire had been attached to one of the ropes which dangled from the retreating boat. This wire was hooked to the railing of the platform. It had tightened as the ship moved down the ways. Even as I looked, the whole section of the platform on which Laura Kohune stood sagged and then went down with a crash.

The official who had been standing at her side jumped sideways, but Laura had no chance. I saw her arms wave wildly in the air, grasping helplessly at nothing. Then she disappeared completely from view as the whole front of the platform disintegrated.

The rear portion on which I stood remained in place. I couldn't understand how that was possible. I didn't understand until later and I wasn't thinking of it at the moment. I had a glimpse of Laura's son. His thin face was white, his eyes black, startled-looking. I shouted at him, hardly knowing what I said. He only managed to look dazed. Then I crowded past him trying to reach the ground.

How I reached her body, I'll never remember. There was quite a group of dungareed men around as I shoved through until I could see. "Is she hurt?"

A big guy that had been bending over her, straightened at my words and turning, gave me a slow measured look. "She ain't hurt, mister," he said. "She's dead. She broke her neck."

I shouldered him aside and bent over the body. She was pretty well banged up by the fall, but it seemed almost impossible to me that Laura Kohune was dead. Those things didn't happen. They shouldn't happen to people who were in my care, people who I was supposed to be guarding.

I turned and said to the big guy, "How'd that wire happen to be tied to the ship? Why'd the platform collapse so easily?"

He still stared at me. "It didn't happen," he said, turning and pointing to one of the supports. "That didn't break, chum. It was sawed, sawed almost in two. If you ask me this was no accident. It was murder."

THE HEAD of the shipyard police was big. He had a red face and heavy shoulders. Someone told me later that he had once been a professional football player, but at the moment he was making a fair imitation of a cop.

"So you're a detective?" he said. "What was the name again?"

I said that it was Tim Herbert. I brought out my license and police card. I explained that I'd known the dead woman ten or twelve years and that she'd hired me a couple of days before as a bodyguard.

He seized on this. "Who was she afraid of?" he demanded. "Why did she need a bodyguard?"

I surprised him by saying that she didn't need one, that apparently she hadn't been afraid of anyone.

He pounced on my words like a cat jumping onto a mouse. "No, she didn't need a bodyguard. All that happened was that she got killed. What she really needed was a different guy doing the guarding."

His voice had a nasty note and he eyed me closely, his expression a mocking one as if he dared me to take up his words.

Since he outweighed me sixty pounds and looked as if he knew how to use every ounce, I didn't take him up. He wasn't worth arguing with. I'd wait until the F. B. I. or the sheriff's men showed up.

It wasn't much better when Joe Foster got there. Joe was a deputy, attached to the criminal investigation department of the sheriff's office. He was a careful, thorough investigator without too much imagination.

He started by questioning Laura's brother and the son. The brother's name was Clarion, Pat Clarion, and

as I've already said, he was a press agent.

The son was Thomas Jefferson Kohune, Junior, but he's always been called Tom to distinguish him from his dad.

After Joe had worked on them, he turned to me. I did the best I could. I hadn't seen the wire. I hadn't noticed that the supports had been sawed almost in two. I hadn't realized that the stringers which ran under the platform had been cut so that only the front section would be pulled forward onto the ways.

I watched Joe's face as I talked. I'd known him for years, a thin tight nervous man. He said, "We know all this. Someone planned to kill her. Tim, someone who knew about the ship launching. The point is, who wanted her dead?"

I shrugged. "I wouldn't know."

"But she hired you to guard her." His voice had a wicked sound like the cracking of a lash. "Why did she want a bodyguard? She must have told you what she was afraid of."

"She wasn't afraid of anything." I thought I was telling the truth. "It made her feel important to have a bodyguard. Isn't that true, Clarion?" I turned and looked at her brother.

He wet his lips. "Not entirely. She was afraid of Jerry."

I cursed him under my breath, but I couldn't stop him. He went ahead and told about all their marriage troubles and he told the wife's side of it.

Joe Foster listened, his cold eyes glinting. "Did Kohune know that his wife was to launch this ship?"

Clarion nodded. "Of course. Herbert told him last night. Didn't you, Tim?"

Joe Foster swung to look at me. "Holding out, huh?" The sheriff's deputy sounded angry.

"Now look," I told him, "I've never held out on you. Jerry Kohune's no killer. These people have hounded him and he's had all the

wrong breaks, but he's a swell guy and he didn't have anything to do with Laura's death."

Foster didn't pay any attention to me. He sent a couple of the yard police to locate Jerry and bring him into the office. They brought him inside of ten minutes. He didn't seem worried although he'd been told what had happened. He nodded to me, gave his brother-in-law a slow careful smile, and glanced toward his son.

His expression hardly changed, but I could tell that it cut the heart out of him when the boy swung around so that his back was toward his father.

In that moment I would have broken the little squirt's neck if I could have gotten it between my fingers, but no one else seemed to notice for Joe Foster started to fire questions at Jerry.

"Where were you during the launching?"

Kohune claimed that he had been on the far side of the yard, but he couldn't prove it; it didn't prove that he might not have sawed through the platform supports, or had a friend do it for him.

There was no real evidence, but I knew that Jerry was going to be arrested. Joe Foster needed a pinch, Jerry was the only one in sight.

CHAPTER II

THE evening papers gave it a big play. *Former Movie Executive Accused in Wife's Death. Thomas Jefferson (Jerry) Kohune Held in Shipyard Slaying.*

They'd dragged out their biggest type. I sat in the small grill just off Hollywood Boulevard and ate slowly, reading as I ate.

The place was packed. All eating places were packed nowadays, so I thought nothing of it when a hurrying waiter seated the girl at my table.

I didn't even glance at her until she leaned forward. "Aren't you Tim Herbert?"

I looked then. The hair, showing beneath the edge of her little blue hat, was blonde. The eyes were blue-grey, level, and she was really good-looking. There was something about her that was familiar, but I couldn't recall where I'd seen her.

"I'm Herbert," I admitted cautiously. I've been around Hollywood so long that I like to be certain who I'm talking to.

"I'm Nora Colfax." She was still leaning forward. Her tone was low, but it reached me distinctly above the rattle of the dishes. "I used to be Jerry Kohune's secretary. Remember?"

I remembered then. "It's rather a coincidence, running into you today."

"No coincidence," she said. "I saw you through the window and came in. I want to talk to you if you don't mind."

"I don't mind. Go ahead."

"Not here," she said.

I shrugged, knowing she was right. Hollywood is a sounding board. You can't talk to anyone for ten minutes without some reporter spotting you. Newspaper men aren't fools. If one of the columnists saw me talking with Jerry Kohune's former secretary so soon after the murder, there was no telling what kind of story he'd print.

"Where do we talk?" I finished my coffee at a gulp.

"Your place or mine, I don't care."

Her place was closer, so we went out and found a cab. The apartment building turned out to be a yellow brick affair which covered a full block and had more entrances than a rabbit warren.

"I don't know how you ever find the right door," I kidded her as we went in the entrance and rode a small automatic elevator to the third floor.

"I tie a piece of string to my door

knob and unwind it as I leave." She was trying to kid back and not making a very good job of it. Something was worrying her plenty. It showed in both voice and manner.

She paused to fit her key in the lock, turned it, and pushed the door wide. Then she stepped in and turned on the light. As she did so, she stopped, uttering a tiny cry.

I was directly behind her. I couldn't see much of the room, but what little I could see looked as if it had been the path for an overactive cyclone.

After her first surprise, the girl stepped forward gingerly into the mess. I followed, shutting the door.

"Poor maid service you have here."

She didn't answer. She just stood there for a full minute looking at the torn-up room. Whoever had searched the room had done a thorough job. They hadn't left a single thing in place, not even the rugs.

The girl went forward slowly and started to gather her truck together, sorting as she did so. I couldn't make out whether she was scared, shocked, or merely angry. The pillows had been slit and the feathers were everywhere. The mattress on her fold-down bed had been slashed. As I've said, even the rugs had been dragged from their places and tossed into a corner.

I helped her as best I could and we got a little order out of the cluttered room. When we finished, I handed her a cigarette and she dropped exhausted on the couch.

"What were they looking for, kid? Who were they?"

She shook her head. "I don't know—Tim—I—" words failed her and she drew in a lungful of quieting smoke.

"Look," I told her. "What goes on? You wanted to see me. It had to be about Jerry. We come up here, find your room torn up, and you don't know what it's all about."

SHE wet her lips. "Look, I—I feel terrible about Jerry. He was the grandest guy I ever worked for. A swell boss if I ever had one. I haven't got much money, ten or eleven hundred that I've managed to save, but, well, I'll spend every nickel of it to get him free. I want you to work on it. I want you to find out who actually killed Mrs. Kohune. I could use my money to hire a lawyer. I almost did, but I've decided that a detective would be smarter. Laura was scared. I know it."

"You seem to know a lot about it," I was watching the girl carefully. Her attitude made me wonder. Her face was flushed, her eyes bright. Some people might even have called them starry. It wasn't anything new, a secretary in love with her boss, but for some reason I didn't like the thought of this girl being romantically interested in Jerry Kohune.

"I do," she told me. "I've been working for Laura, for Mrs. Kohune."

I started at that. Employment with Jerry's wife was the last place I'd have expected to find this girl.

She saw the surprise in my eyes and tried to explain. "I—well, I was always friendly with Mrs. Kohune and her brother. Clarion used to be Jerry's press agent in the old days. There wasn't any real reason why I shouldn't work for them. Jerry didn't have a place for me."

"I'm surprised that Laura could afford a secretary," I said.

"Oh, she's been working. She was hostess at a bridge club. She did all right."

"And didn't offer to help Jerry." My voice was sour. "I guess the cops would consider that a good motive for him having knocked her off."

Her face got angry. "Are you going to start accusing him too? That's absurd. Jerry Kohune wouldn't have taken help from his wife or anyone else and you know it."

I knew she was right, but I was

still a little sore at the thought that she had been working for Laura. It didn't make much sense since I'd been working for Laura myself.

"Look," I said. "If you went to a lawyer, he'd try to figure everything that the prosecution had against his client, so he'd know how to build his defense. I've got to do that. I've got to find out who else might have reason to want Laura Kohune dead."

"Did Jerry want to remarry? Could that be a reason for him wanting to get rid of his wife?"

She looked startled. "I—I wouldn't know."

My voice tightened. "This isn't any time to stall. Are you in love with Jerry?"

"Of course not." She seemed genuinely angry now. "What in the world made you think of that?"

"The cops will think of it," I warned her, not convinced entirely by her manner. "We've got to consider every contingency."

"They'd be wrong." She still sounded angry.

"Okay," I said, switching the subject. "What about this bridge club? Where is it? Who owns it?"

She shook her head. "I don't know much about it. She was associated with some man named Lampwick. That's about all I can tell you."

She'd told me a lot, more than she realized. I guessed that she was talking about Tony Lampwick, and if she was, I didn't care for the smell of this business. It was beginning to smell.

I hesitated for a moment, then I shrugged. I wasn't learning anything talking to her; nothing, that is, save for the fact that she wanted Jerry Kohune cleared of his wife's murder.

"Okay," I told her. "I'll do the best I can, but don't expect miracles."

For an instant there was doubt in her eyes. "Shall—shall I write you a check now?"

"Keep your money," I told her. "This investigation is on the house. Jerry's a friend of mine and Laura was my client at the time the platform fell out from under her. You may not believe it, but there's a certain business honor, even in the detective racket. I'll clear up this killing if I can, to keep my own record straight. Save the dough and hire a lawyer if I fail."

"Thank you," she said and all signs of anger had faded from her face. "Thank you, Tim Herbert. You're a nice guy."

"You think so." I rose and she rose also, moving toward the door with me. "Do a nice guy a favor, will you, honey? Tell me who searched your apartment."

She met my stare without batting an eye. "I don't know," she said. "I haven't the slightest idea."

I HADN'T an idea either. None of the business seemed to make much sense. Why had Laura hired me for a bodyguard? If she'd really been afraid of someone, why hadn't she warned me? I mulled it over in my head all the way back to my own apartment, trying to fit the few pieces I had into the puzzle.

I decided that I didn't know enough, that maybe I'd better talk to Pat Clarion, or maybe Tony Lampwick. I was going to talk to Lampwick a lot sooner than I had any idea, for when I shoved open the door of my suite I thought for an instant that I was back in the girl's apartment.

It looked as if the same cyclone had visited me and that it had been just as destructive. The whole place had been turned inside out, but there was one difference. At the girl's place the searchers had finished their work and gone. Here they were still at their labors.

I heard sounds in the bedroom and reached for my gun, but I'd made noise opening the door and that noise attracted a big guy. He ap-

peared in the bedroom entrance, an automatic frowning out of his hairy fist.

I'd been reaching toward my shoulder clip, but I stopped when he said, "Hold it, Herbert."

I froze, partly from surprise, partly because it wasn't wise to disobey Tony Lampwick at any time; especially when he already had his gun in his hand and its ugly nose was pointing directly at my wishbone.

I brought my empty hand into sight slowly and used it to shut the hall door.

The gambler came toward me, moving on the balls of his feet. He moved quickly and lightly for a guy that weighed a good two-twenty.

While he was reaching inside my coat and getting my gun, a second man appeared from the bedroom. He was smaller than Lampwick. His hair was black, shiny, and well-oiled. His mustache was so even that it looked more like a cutout that had been pasted onto his upper lip than it did like a real bunny he had grown himself. His name was Claude Hepper and they called him the Duke.

When he saw who it was that Lampwick had under his gun, he smiled and his white teeth made an almost chalk-like line in contrast to the blackness of his mustache.

"Well, look who came home. You're just in time, cousin."

"I'm just in time to kneel on your chest and pull that soup strainer of yours out hair by hair," I told him sourly. "What's the idea of kicking my stuff around as if it were part of a salvage drive?"

His voice was expressionless. "Take it easy. We haven't hurt anything much."

I stared around. One of my couch cushions had been slit and was leaking stuffing and springs all over the floor. "I'd hate to see you when you felt really destructive." I was so angry that it was difficult to hold my voice level.

His grin widened. "This is a little sample, chum. We started on the furniture, but it will give you a mild idea of what we'll do to you if you stall about turning over that stock. We aren't fooling, Tim. We're here on business."

"Stock?" I looked blank because I felt blank. I had no idea what he was talking about. "Stock in what, a gambling joint or a bridge club?"

He kept smiling, but his lips had a frozen look. "No cracks, palo."

"Is it a crack to mention your business? You surely aren't getting ashamed of the sucker traps you operate, not after all these years?"

A LITTLE circle of white grew around the Duke's lips and the smile went away from his mouth. His black eyes glittered and got dangerous.

"You always were a smart punk," he said stiffly. "For years I've expected someone to push your face in and just maybe it will be my job."

I kept smiling, but it was an effort. Duke Hepper was no guy to take lightly. He'd been around town for years with his smooth white fingers in every kind of gambling racket you can name.

Recently he and Lampwick had grabbed a piece of the bridge club business. Bridge might be figured a chicken feed racket by those who don't know, but when you've seen games for ten to twenty cents a point, you know that they don't pay off with pennies.

I didn't get all this, but I was taking it careful. Nora Colfax had said that Laura had been working at a bridge club and the girl had mentioned Lampwick. There was a tie-up somewhere, but I didn't want to show too much interest. I didn't get this conversation about some missing stock.

I was still sore, burning inside, but Lampwick's gun made me watch what I said. Lampwick had no sense of humor. If the Duke had told him

to shoot, he'd have shot, even if the full Los Angeles police force had been standing at his elbow. It takes brains and imagination to be afraid and Lampwick had neither. He was just a big hunk of muscle with a killer's instinct.

"Kidding aside," I said hurriedly. "I don't get any of this. I can't think of a reason why you should plow through my junk like a snow scraper clearing a mountain road. The only stock I've ever owned was a couple of shares in an oil heater firm which made heaters that wouldn't heat."

"A wise guy," said Lampwick. "Maybe he could remember better if I gave his arm a little twist."

"Not yet," said the Duke. He had controlled his temper and was smiling again. "No need to be doing anything hasty. I'm certain that as soon as Tim understands we really mean business, he'll be ready to talk."

"I'm ready now," I said, watching Lampwick from the corner of my eye. "But I still don't have any idea what this is all about."

The Duke frowned. "I suppose," his smooth voice was heavy with sarcasm, "that you never heard of the Tungsten Dream Mining Company."

"I didn't."

He wet his lips, glancing toward Lampwick. "I guess we're going to have to use a wee bit of persuasion, Tony."

The big man grinned as he stepped forward. His two eyeteeth were a little longer than his others. When he grinned, they gave him something of the appearance of a laughing walrus.

But I didn't smile. I tried to step away. He was too quick. He seized my right arm with his free hand and twisted it until I was certain that it would come loose at the socket.

The pain made me bend forward until I was almost double. Sweat stood out on my forehead and the ligaments felt as if they'd been pulled from their moorings. And still the guy kept twisting. I thought he'd

never stop. I was so groggy that I could barely hear the Duke when he said:

"That's enough for the moment. Maybe his tongue is looser now."

It was. There was no kidding about that. I'd have told them almost anything to keep the big bruiser from grabbing my arm again. But I didn't know anything to tell and I hurried to make this plain.

"Look," I said. "If you're bending my arm merely for exercise, okay. But if you think it will make me talk, you're nuts because I don't know anything to tell you. If you'll explain certain things, maybe I can help. I'm not stalling, I'm just ignorant."

LAMPWICK reached again for my arm, but the Duke halted him with a tiny gesture of his hand. "Listen, Herbert. We know that Laura hired you as a bodyguard. We saw you having dinner with her secretary tonight.

"Now, she certainly wouldn't have hired you without telling you that she wanted to be guarded against us, would she?"

"She did." I managed to keep my voice steady. "She didn't tell me anything, just forked over twenty-five bucks a day."

He considered this, smoothing out his little mustache with the tips of his fingers as if it weren't already smoother than any mustache had any right to be.

"That doesn't make sense."

"A lot about Laura doesn't make sense," I told him. "Nora Colfax told me that she was managing one of your bridge clubs."

"That's right." He was watching me with care.

I laughed. "Laura was the last one I'd pick to run one of those sucker traps."

"That's because you haven't brains." His voice showed a faint edge of contempt. "She was pals with a lot of rich Hollywood dames.

They didn't know she was working with us and she steered them against our games."

I thought it over in silence. It was about the kind of trick I'd have expected of Laura, steering her friends into the Duke's joint and taking a cut in the sucker money.

"It doesn't explain this stock you're talking about," I said finally. "What about that?"

He considered and I thought for a moment that he was going to order Lampwick to give me another arm twisting. I got set with my left. My right was pretty useless from the first dose. I meant to slug the big bruiser if I got a bullet in the belly for doing it. Anything was better than being crippled.

But instead the Duke said, "This stock we're looking for belongs to a little guy who hung around the club. He's a funny bird whose clothes don't fit, and he certainly didn't look like dough. His name was Southern. I wanted to toss him out on his ear, but Laura wouldn't let me.

"Finally, last week, Laura came into the office. She said that Southern had lost all his dough in one of the big games. He had some stock in a mine and he wanted to sell it or borrow on it.

"I laughed, but she said that he'd just lose the dough anyway so why not let him have it. In the end I let her talk me down and gave the squirt two grand for five hundred shares. He lost the two grand that night and I proceeded to forget all about it."

"Go on," I said.

His eyes glinted. "Well, three days ago, this Southern shows up at the club. He's nearly crazy. It seems that some big Eastern company is taking over the mine. They're offering a hundred and twenty dollars a share for the stock and he wants it back.

"I look for the shares, but they aren't around. Laura isn't there, so I call her at home and tell her I want the stock. She just laughs at me. I threaten to come and get it, but she

tells me to save myself the trouble, that she's given it to a friend to keep."

"And who was the friend?"

"You," he said. "I figured that out tonight. I thought first that the secretary gal had it."

"You're a fool," I told him. "I never had the stock. I never so much as heard of it. She probably hunted up this Southern and made a deal with him."

The Duke shook his head. "She saw Southern all right, but she didn't make a deal. The old boy was at the bridge club last night, trying to buy it from me."

"I don't understand," I said slowly. "If the stock was transferred to you—"

"It wasn't. Laura had it transferred to herself. I didn't pay much attention. At the time I didn't think it was worth anything."

"And now?"

He hesitated. "I offered her twenty-five thousand dollars for it last night."

"And she wouldn't sell?"

He shrugged. "She promised to talk to me this evening. Now she's dead. The stock's gone and I want it."

"If the cops knew this," I told him and stopped for someone was pounding on the door, calling sharply for me to open up. It was Joe Foster's voice and the Duke recognized it. I could tell by his face.

H HE SWORE, looking around at the disordered room. "There's a back door," I said, "if you hurry." It may sound funny that I was giving him a chance to get out, but it wasn't. I didn't want him there when Foster came in. I didn't want him explaining about the stock. After all, Jerry was still married to Laura. Under the California law, half of everything she'd owned at death would belong to him. It would just be another motive to chalk up against him.

The Duke hesitated. "If you talk," he muttered.

"I forgot how to talk when I went into this business," I answered.

"Well, keep forgetting." His frown was a warning. He motioned to Lampwick and they moved quickly out through the kitchen. Not until I heard the rear door close quietly did I move to admit the cops.

Joe Foster was not alone. He had a man from the F.B.I. office with him. Joe walked into the place and stopped, staring around. "What goes on?"

I shrugged. "I'm sore and when I get mad, I tear up cushions and chew the furniture."

Foster's eyes were very narrow. "And what made you mad?"

"Cops asking fool questions," I told him. "I'm liable to go into another fit at any moment. That will be bad because there isn't much furniture left."

Foster's temper was thin. "For years you've done pretty much as you pleased around this town, but those times are gone. This is war and this," he indicated his companion, "is Stevens from the Federal Bureau."

I nodded to Stevens and shook hands. Foster said, "You've got to remember that a shipyard is a war industry and that the Bureau never takes chances. I'd advise you to answer Stevens' questions."

I didn't need his advice. Stevens looked very smart, the kind of a guy that would stand for no nonsense. "Sure," I told them. "I'll answer anything I can."

Stevens considered me thoughtfully. "I wanted to ask you why Mrs. Kohune hired a bodyguard; why she thought one necessary?"

I hesitated for an instant. "It's still the same answer that I gave earlier. She didn't tell me. I thought it was because it would make her feel important."

Stevens glanced around the room.

"You realize the trouble you can get into for lying?"

"Look," I told him with a show of anger, "I've been at this game a long time. I want no trouble with you Feds, but I still don't know anything."

He asked a lot more questions. I didn't answer them. Joe Foster didn't speak until they were leaving, then he said as he went through the door, "She's a pretty girl, Tim. I hope you enjoyed your dinner. I also hope that it doesn't cost you too much."

CHAPTER III

THE hotel was decidedly second class, but it was the kind of joint I'd have expected Southern to pick since it was an unofficial headquarters for mining men. I'd tried several on the phone before I found the man registered here.

I was just about to cross the street to the entrance when I noticed the parked car. Because of the dimout it was hard to see, the street lamps were pretty well hooded, but just as I looked, a match flared in the car's front seat. The little pocket of light outlined Pat Clarion's sharp features for a full moment.

I frowned and stepped backward, deeper into the shadow of the building line. A Sixth Street car rattled by, its flat wheels beating out heavy sound from the narrow gage tracks. There wasn't much traffic. What there was, moved at a snail's pace. I stood there wondering why Clarion was parked before Southern's hotel.

There was a man in the seat at Clarion's side. I guessed rather than saw it was Jerry Kohune's son. I couldn't figure what they were doing there. Then I had my answer, for the hotel door swung open and in the light which leaked out I saw the departing girl. It was Nora Colfax.

I caught my breath, watching her hesitate for a moment, then she turned down the street to where a

small coupe was parked, climbed in, and pulled away.

I heard the motor of Clarion's car start, saw him pull after the girl, and stepped forward, but before I could leave the curb, a third car had taken up the chase. I had a glimpse of the driver as he swished past. It was Tony Lampwick. He was alone.

I stood for a long moment staring after the parade, wondering if I should join it, then changed my mind, crossed to the hotel, and asked for Mr. Southern.

Southern was in his room, Southern would see me. I rode up in the asthmatic elevator and walked along the fourth floor to the end of the hall. A door was standing partly open and a voice called, telling me to come in.

Southern was a little guy, about sixty, with a funny dried-up face. His cheeks were round and red, so that I almost suspected him of using rouge. He was in a chair by the window overlooking Sixth Street. He didn't bother to get up.

"You wanted to see me, Herbert? What about—Mrs. Kohune's death?"

I stared, startled by the question, and he gave a high, crackling laugh. "I can read the papers," he told me. "Saw your picture. Good likeness."

I kept staring. I'd never seen anyone quite like him before. His body was so dried that it looked as if the sun had baked all the moisture out of it. His coat and vest were off and a leather harness made a pattern across the whiteness of his shirt. There wasn't any gun in the clip and I glanced around expecting to see an old fashioned forty-four lying on the dresser or the bed.

There was none in sight, but the old man had not missed my look. He laughed with a kind of wicked pleasure. "Won't find it," he said. "Don't bring it to town. Haven't got a permit." His eyes were small and round and shiny.

"Then what do you wear that rig for?"

His grin was malicious. "Feel undressed without it. Besides, it scares people. I like people to be scared of me. I'm bad."

FOR an instant I tried to decide whether he was kidding or not. I don't think he was. "Look," I said, "I had a visitor tonight. He was looking for some stock that once belonged to you."

The little old guy squinted at me. "The Duke, huh?"

"Either you're a mind reader or you know a lot about this."

He gave me a tight-lipped smile. "I know a lot," he said, "but I don't know the answer to the question you're getting ready to ask. I don't know who killed the Kohune woman."

"You don't?"

He shook his head. His eyes were bright and round and considering. "Look, bub, how would you like to make some dough?"

I was startled. This guy was always startling me. "Everyone likes to make dough," I stalled. "How much?"

"That's up to you," he told me. "This Duke fellow is a gambler, but he's a sure thing gambler. I've seen his kind lots of times. He's so anxious to turn a crooked dollar that he would fall over his own feet doing it."

I nodded. That was the way the Duke figured out any way you looked at him. "So what has that got to do with my making some dough?"

"Everything," he said. "This Hepper wants to get his hands on five hundred shares of stock. He thinks that if he does, he can sell it for plenty, either to me or to some Eastern businessmen. Right?"

Since the Duke had told me the same thing, I merely nodded. "Right."

"Well, it's a shame the Duke can't get hold of this stock. It's a shame you don't sell it to him."

"And just where would I get it?"

Now I was beginning to get interested.

He winked. "Why, I might be able to get five hundred shares for you. I'll tell you what. You give me ten grand for them, then you can sell them to the Duke for twenty or twenty-five thousand. That's a good deal, isn't it?"

"Maybe," I pretended to hesitate. "The trouble is that I haven't got ten grand."

He considered this and I could tell by his expression that he was disappointed. "Well now—a big detective like you should have plenty of money. How much have you got?"

"Eighty-six bucks," I told him.

He snorted. "I guess the detective racket doesn't pay as well as I figured. I wonder, can I trust you?"

"Some have," I told him, "but I wouldn't advise it."

He grinned at that. "You're all right, Tim. I'm going to trust you. I'll give you the stock and you sell it to Duke Hepper. Say you found it, say you took it out of the dead woman's purse, say anything you like, but don't tell him that it came from me or the deal is off, savvy?"

I nodded. He got out of his chair then. He went over to the bed and peeled back the mattress. When he turned around my gun was in my hand and it wasn't far from the end of his nose.

He stared at the gun, getting almost cross-eyed. "What's that for?" His little eyes got smoky and dangerous. In his hand there was an envelope. I reached out and took it from his fingers. Inside were five stock certificates, each for one hundred shares in the Tungsten Dream Mining Company.

"These," I said, "are going to send you to the gas chamber. You killed Laura Kohune to get them."

He grunted and the sound held more disgust than it did fear or anger. "Be your age, Timmy, my boy. I've got an alibi for the whole day. I didn't have anything to do with that dame's death."

"Then where did these come from?"

His eyes were mocking. "I got them from a friend, pal. Put up that shooting iron and stop trying to be a mastermind. You can make yourself some dough with those, sell them to the Duke. Give me half and keep half for yourself."

I was staring. He said that he'd gotten them from a friend. I kept remembering that I'd seen Nora Colfax leaving this hotel. Was she the friend? If, so, how had she gotten them? Why, since he'd seemed so anxious to buy from the Duke, was the old miner offering to sell them to the gambler?

None of it made much sense, but I wanted a chance to think. "Okay," I told him. "It's a deal."

"Fine." His eyes measured me. "Remember I get half. I won't be at this hotel, but I'll get in touch with you. And don't try to hold out, pal. Don't hold out. I've killed bigger men than you. lots of them."

JOE FOSTER woke me up the next morning. I hadn't slept well. After leaving Southern, I'd tried to call the girl, gotten no answer, and tried the bridge club. The Duke wasn't there and no one could tell me where to find him.

When Foster knocked, I hauled myself out of bed, found slippers and robe, and padded across the floor to open the door. There were a couple of men from the city homicide squad with him and none of them were friendly.

I blinked sleepily until one of them demanded, "Did you know a guy named Southern?"

I almost shook my head. I wasn't thinking of the little miner and I just caught myself in time. "Why, yes," I stared around. "What's happened? What's the matter?"

"Nothing," the homicide man told me, "nothing at all if you don't count murder. Southern was shot in his room last night or this morning

early. No one heard the shot. There isn't much wonder. The killer wrapped his gun in a wool blanket." I couldn't seem to start thinking. I must have sounded stupid when I said, "So what?"

"So you were up there to see him last night. So was a girl named Colfax. She left just before you arrived."

I didn't say anything and he got mad. "Look, Herbert, if she'd killed him, he wouldn't have been alive when you arrived. If you killed him, he would have. This thing is all tied up with that shipyard murder. The Colfax girl was Laura Kohune's secretary as you well know. What's your angle? You always have one."

I shook my head, thinking of the stock that was inside my coat pocket. I didn't know yet where I stood, or where the girl stood, and I wasn't ready to talk. "Southern was alive when I left him," I said shortly. "You can believe that or not as you like."

They didn't like it. They took me downtown for questioning, but Southern had ordered ice water after I'd left. The bellboy had seen him alive. I blessed the old miner for getting thirsty. It made it a lot easier for me to get away from the cops.

After I left the detective bureau, I went on down Spring Street to a broker's office. I went in and asked him about the Tungsten Dream Mining Company. I said I had a chance to pick up some shares cheaply and wondered what they were worth.

He looked as if he thought I was crazy. "What goes on, Tim? That stock's unlisted. It's strictly a cat and dog. For months you could pick it up over the counter at two cents on the share and no one would touch it.

"This morning I got an order to buy a hundred shares and we can't find any and now you come along asking questions. What goes on?"

"Maybe some outside company found some new values at the mine."

He shook his head. "Nuts. I looked

at the place myself not six months ago. It's an old copper property east of Bishop, just over the Nevada line. There's Scheelite float around. I used a dark lamp and found some myself, but you can find float in any of these hills. It washes out from little stringers that are too small to work. There's not enough tungsten in the property to make a light globe and there hasn't been any development work done. If you ask me, something smells."

It smelled all right, smelled of murder. I didn't tell him that. Instead I asked, "Who gave you the buying order on it? Would you mind telling me?"

He shrugged and pressed a bell, asking his secretary to find the order. When it came, the broker looked surprised. "Why, it's Jerry Kohune. I haven't had an order from him in over a year and isn't he in jail? Wasn't his wife killed yesterday?"

I nodded, getting up. "She was," I said, starting for the door. "She most certainly was."

Poor Jerry Kohune looked as if he hadn't slept well on the jail bed. He also looked surprised as he was led into the visitors' room and saw me waiting on the other side of the screen.

"Tim," he said, hurrying forward. "Tim. Thanks for coming."

I told him I was glad to come and his mouth twisted wryly. "There aren't many who are. The only one I've seen is a girl who used to work for me."

"I've only got a couple of minutes," I warned him, "and there are questions to ask. How come you're trying to buy mining stock?"

He stared. "Stock—are you crazy? I haven't bought any stock for well over a year. What would I use for money?"

"Someone placed a buying order with a broker I know for Tungsten Dream Mining."

"Never heard of it." His face

twisted. "I hope that he didn't get stuck too much. I can't pay off—"

"Don't worry." I got up. "There wasn't any offered. You're safe on that. Keep the chin up, boy."

I left him, rode the elevator to the street level, and crossed the civic center to where my car was parked. On the way I stopped in a phone booth and phoned Nora Colfax's apartment. There was no answer. I hung up and went on to my car.

I drove to Hollywood and checked with several friends, then I drove out to the house that Laura Kohune had occupied with her brother and son.

The brother wasn't there, but the son was. He'd been swimming in the pool and he threw a terry cloth robe about his shoulders as I came down the terrace steps. His thin face wasn't particularly friendly as he greeted me.

"I'm looking for your uncle," I told him.

The boy shook his head. "I don't know where he went. He left early this morning. Say, who was this guy Southern that the cops were questioning me about?"

I looked at him. "Southern? Oh, the miner that was killed?"

The boy nodded. His thin face had two spots of color above his high cheekbones. "What's the matter with those police? Isn't it enough that my mother is killed and my father arrested without bothering me about some one I've never heard of?"

"You'd never heard of him?"

The boy nodded. "That's right."

"Then what were you and your uncle parked outside of his hotel for last night?"

The boy started as if I'd touched him with a hot iron. He fumbled a minute for words, then said angrily, "All right, I had heard of him, but I didn't know anything about him getting killed."

"What were you doing there?"

"We were following Nora Colfax."

He stared at me angrily. "We saw her having dinner with you."

"So what?"

"You and she were plotting something," his voice was accusing. "I'm not going to talk to you any more."

He didn't, either, he swung around and stalked into the house. I stood staring after him for a minute, then went back to my car.

I drove down to the shipyard and talked with the yard police, then I put in a phone call for the bridge club.

It was about six and I was more than half surprised when the Duke answered the phone.

"This is Tim Herbert," I said. "Are you still interested in buying that stock?"

There was a long pause at the other end of the wire. "You mean you have it?" he asked finally.

"I know where it is."

He thought that over. "I don't know whether I want it or not. That guy Southern is dead. I wouldn't know what to do with it."

"You might sell it to the guys he was dealing with."

His voice sounded almost bitter.

"If I knew who they were."

"I know," I said.

"Then come over to the club."

"I'm coming." I hung up, grinning to myself, then I called the sheriff's office.

CHAPTER IV

THE bridge club was a swanky place, a brick house on the western end of the Boulevard beyond LaBrea. Once, in the days before the film society had moved to Beverly and Westwood, the place had belonged to a producer and his actress wife.

A colored maid in a trim black and white uniform met me at the door and asked if I had a card. But before I could answer, Tony Lampwick appeared at the end of the hall and came toward us.

"The boss is waiting for you," he said, staring at me hard. "If this is a fast one, I'll break the bones in both of your arms."

My right still ached from the twisting he had given it on the preceding evening, so I didn't tell him to go to the devil as I felt like doing. Instead I just grinned and followed him down the hall to the small square office at the rear.

Nora Colfax was sitting in a chair beside Hepper's desk. She looked up and I could tell by her face that she was surprised to see me.

I gave her a grin and glanced toward Hepper. He was watching me with his black eyes, the tips of his fingers rubbing softly across the end of his mustache. "Were you kidding over the phone?"

"I never kid," I told him.

"Then you really know who this Eastern gang are, the ones that will buy the stock?"

"I told you, didn't I?"

Lampwick had taken up a position behind me, close to the door, cutting off my retreat. He didn't pull his gun, but he didn't need to. I knew that it was in his pocket ready.

"If you know them and know that they'll buy the stock, why did you call up and offer to sell me some?"

"Did I?" I opened my eyes very wide.

"Stop stalling." It was a growl from Lampwick.

"I'm not stalling," I said. "I called up with the offer. I wanted an opening to tell you that I knew who Southern's mysterious stock buyers had been. I figured that if I made such an offer, you'd give me the chance to tell you."

The Duke considered. "I don't trust you, Herbert. You're too slippery. You've always got an angle of some kind."

"Why not?" I said. "You have too for that matter."

He grinned at that, taking it as a compliment. "All right. Who are

these guys? How much will they pay?"

"You're going too fast," I told him. "You just said that I've always got an angle. Well, I've got one now. I want to know where I come in on this. How much do I get if I arrange the sale."

Again Lampwick growled, sounding like an angry dog. "I can make him talk, boss."

I swung around, my hand deep in my pocket, holding my gun. I thrust it toward him and said pleasantly, "There isn't going to be any arm-twisting tonight, Tony, my pal. The first time you move, I'm going to bounce a slug off your wishbone. I don't like you and I don't mean maybe."

The Duke said hurriedly. "Now, now, wait. There's no need to argue."

"I'll say there isn't," I told him. "What's my cut?"

He wet his lips. "A third of what I make."

"What you make." I was suspicious. "What do you mean, what you make? Haven't you got the stock?"

"Well, no," he sounded almost embarrassed. "I haven't got it, but I know who has. I can get it in a couple of minutes."

I turned and looked at the girl. She hadn't moved since I'd entered the room, then there was a knock on the door beside Lampwick and the big man reached across to open it.

PAT CLARION looked startled when he walked into the bridge club office. His careful eyes ranged around the room and settled on me. They had something of the appearance of a trapped animal. He ran his tongue in a circle around his dry lips.

"What is this? What's Herbert doing here?"

"Herbert's in the deal," the Duke told him. "He knows where we can sell the stock."

"What stock?" Clarion tried to look blank.

"What stock?" The gambler took half a step around the end of the desk. "Are you crazy? What stock? Why the stock you found in your sister's desk. What stock would I mean?"

The press agent hesitated. "I don't like it. I don't trust Herbert."

"Naturally he doesn't," I said. "He knows that I won't go for that story of his finding the stock in any desk."

"What do you mean?" The Duke was looking from one to the other of us. "If he didn't find it, where did he get it?"

"He stole it from her," I said. "And then he arranged for that platform to collapse under her at the shipyard. That's going to send you to the gas chamber, Pat, and you know it."

He tried to laugh and didn't make a very good job. "You're crazy. I don't know what you're talking about."

"Don't you?" I looked at him. "I think you do. I've just been down to the shipyard. The police told me that you were there in the morning before the launching. They saw you around the platform, but they didn't think anything about it."

"That doesn't prove anything. A lot of people were around the platform at one time or another."

"That's right, but those other people weren't in any spot to steal that stock from your sister. You were. You were dead broke with your creditors howling up and down Hollywood Boulevard. You had to have money and have it fast. You tried to borrow from your sister and she either didn't have it or wouldn't loan it to you."

"So you overheard her talking to the Duke about it, got the idea that it was very valuable, and stole it. That's why Laura hired me, to find it and get it back. She couldn't go to the police, she couldn't stand any publicity because the stock was

phony. She and the miner, Southern, were pulling the old sucker game on the Duke."

"What?" They were all staring at me.

I nodded. "The stock isn't of any value. It was the old skin game. Southern lost the stock and Laura took it away from the club. Then Southern comes rushing in wildly, wanting to buy it back. The Duke falls. He tries to scare Laura into returning it, fails, and finally offers to buy it from her. She sells, maybe for ten, maybe for fifteen thousand. The Duke takes his stock and hunts for Southern, only the old man has vanished. The Duke is stuck for the dough. You all know the old routine. It's been worked a thousand times."

Hepper was staring. He didn't like to think of being taken in. He considered himself a very smart boy. "You're nuts."

For answer I produced the five hundred shares from my inside pocket. "There's the stock that Southern gave me before he was killed last night. I was supposed to sell it to you and split with him."

Clarion stared at my stock as if he couldn't believe his eyes, then reached into his coat pocket. That was the motion that I'd been waiting for. I jumped forward, caught his wrist, and dragged an envelope into sight. It held the missing stock, the shares over which Laura Kehune had met her death.

But Clarion wasn't through yet. He snarled at me as I tossed the envelope on the desk beside my stock. "That proves nothing—"

"No," I told him. "It doesn't. You had the stock and you killed your sister, but you were still scared because you thought Nora Colfax might know something. So you followed her last night. You saw her eating with me and later you trailed her to Southern's hotel.

"That gave you a start. You'd meant to wait several days to contact the old miner, but if Nora was

buzzing around, you had to move fast. You trailed her somewhere and then you came back to Southern's hotel—"

"I didn't—"

"You did," said Tony Lampwick. "I was trailing the girl after I left Herbert's apartment. I followed her to the hotel where Southern was holed up. Halfway there I realized that someone else was tailing her so I dropped back.

"The girl went in, stayed fifteen minutes. When she came out, you and your kid nephew trailed on to her apartment, I followed you. When you got to her place, you left your nephew watching outside and drove away. I stayed with you. You went back to Southern's hotel and sneaked in the side entrance. Twenty minutes later, I went up to see the old jay-bird myself. He was dead."

CLARION made a bolt for the door. He never got there, for half across the office Tony Lampwick shot him. His feet went out from under him and he went down. The sound of the shot brought in the cops that I'd stationed outside. When Joe Foster bent over the press agent, he was dead.

Later, as I drove the girl downtown to arrange Jerry's release, I told her, "You certainly made it tough, horsing around. Why didn't you tell me all you knew about Southern when you talked to me in your apartment? Why did you put in that order to buy that mining stock with Jerry's broker?"

She hesitated. "I'm sorry. I—I knew that Laura had some kind of stock deal with this Southern, but I didn't know what it was. It never occurred to me that it was connected with her death until after you'd gone. Then I got to looking around my apartment and I realized that whoever had searched it, was hunting something, something that they wanted very badly.

"I thought of Southern then. I was going to call you. Then I remembered that you wouldn't take any money for the case, so I didn't think I had the right to trouble you. I drove over to Southern's hotel and talked to him. It never occurred to me that I was followed. I got nothing out of Southern, but something in his manner made me suspicious, so I put in that buying order this morning through Jerry's broker, just to find out what the stock was really worth."

I looked at her from the corner of my eye. You had to give her credit. She'd gone in there swinging, without asking favors of anyone. "What about Jerry?" I asked, for I had to know. "In love with him?"

She started to get mad, then she gave me a long look and didn't. "Swell," I said. "There's one more thing. It almost gave me heart failure when I walked into that bridge club office and found you there. What in the world were you doing there anyhow?"

"The Duke sent for me," she explained. "He wanted to know what I'd found out from Southern the night before and if I knew the name of the Eastern interests that were interested in the stock. But why should it have given you heart failure?"

I hesitated. "Well, I was pretty certain that Pat Clarion had arranged his sister's death. He'd horsed around the platform before the launching, and I found out that he was dead broke and desperate for money, but I didn't know how to get at him.

"And suddenly it occurred to me that the Duke must know where the stock was, who had it, and therefore, who the murderer was."

"What made you think that?"

"Several things. Principally because he hadn't been after me all day. He'd been certain I had it last night, then suddenly he wasn't chasing me any more. I knew the Duke. I knew that he'd never stop trying to get the stock.

"Since he was no longer bothering me, it meant one of two things, either he'd killed Southern himself, or he knew who had and where the stock was. So when I called him and made a deal to tell him where to sell it, and then walked in and saw you sitting there . . . I thought for a moment you were in the mess. I didn't like the thought."

Her face softened. "But what led you to think that Clarion killed Southern?"

"Put yourself in his place," I told her. "You have the stock. You've killed to get it. You take it to the old miner. Naturally he doesn't want to buy it, for it was a swindle in the first place. Also he probably accuses you of being the murderer. You kill him. That's the way I figured it out, but I had no proof. I couldn't know that Lampwick had been trailing him at the time. That was a break. Half of detective work is breaks."

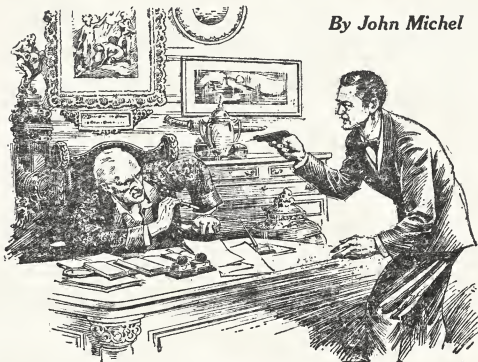
"It must be a tough game," she admitted.

I grinned at her. "It has advantages. Sometimes you meet pretty girls."



The State *vs.* Wm. Shakespeare

By John Michel



Though Will Shakespeare had been dead four hundred years, he'd acquired a modern ghost writer. For this smart forger was determined to sign the old Bard's name to a check for \$100,000!

THE basement window of the Lorgan Memorial Library groaned; its heavy casement flanking cracking in slowly under the expert pressure behind the jimmy. There was an instant of silence as the man behind the main instrument in any crook's carryall relaxed suddenly, then whispering, "Now!" bore down upon the jimmy for the final crack. An instant later the window swung free on its hinges.

Gregory Wolsey, art collector extraordinary, replaced the fragile-looking tool in his overcoat pocket and reached one hand behind him.

"The cutters, Stover," he demanded, "and be quick about it!"

The faultlessly dressed valet crouching in the bushes closely bordering the back wall of the Library reached into his own overcoat inside pocket and withdrew a shining pair of wire-cutting pliers.

Wolsey gently inserted the tool through the window opening, carefully playing the rays from a small flashlight before him, and fished around for a moment until he found what he wanted.

"Ah," he breathed gently. "One second more and—done!" he finished triumphantly. "Notice the finesse, Stover, the exquisite thoroughness of the technique. Removing the danger of an—ah—burglar alarm by the simple procedure of cutting the wires simultaneously, thus short-circuiting the entire basement system. Genius, sheer genius! It would have been different, perhaps, had they been obvious enough to have used a photo-electric cell, but—" He broke off, musing, then, with a rapid nervous gesture, returned the cutters.

"Come, Stover," he continued, crouching down to enter the window, "and remember; do nothing except follow precisely in my footsteps. At any moment we are likely to happen upon a clever trap. The Lorgan Library is noted for its impregnability."

A few minutes later, man and master stood, breathing heavily, on the bare concrete of the basement floor of the Library. Wolsey peered sharply about him in the darkness, listening, while his valet anxiously brushed dust from his bowler which had come too closely into contact with the window flanking. Then, spraying a thin stream of light from his blackout flash, the art connoisseur moved ahead, the faithful Stover plodding behind him.

Wolsey halted abruptly at a huge steel door set in one of the heavy concrete walls. "Probably a storeroom and undoubtedly locked. What I wouldn't give to—but never mind. Stover, bigger game is upstairs. Ah, the door to the inside cellar steps is over here, just as I thought!"

CAREFULLY placing his steps, Wolsey moved rapidly ahead and to the left, pausing at length before an ordinary fire door, heavily sheathed in galvanized iron, and bearing upon

it in red letters the words: *Stairway To Main Floor*. The door was unlocked.

Proceeding noiselessly up the staircase, smelling damply of plaster and wood, both men came to another halt in front of another door. Wolsey thrust a hand behind him.

"The billy, Stover. If you remember from our visit last Sunday during visiting hours, a guard stood before this very door," he whispered in low tones. "It is entirely likely that it is his permanent post. A moment now while I oil these hinges."

He bent down, applying a few drops of oil from a small vial to the triple set of hinges on which the portal swung. Then, very carefully turning the polished knob, he firmly pulled the door open.

The guard was present, his head faintly outlined against the plate glass doors of the Library through which shone the dimmed-out glow of Fifth Avenue. Wolsey moved swiftly. His arm came up silently, then crashed down. There was a muffled thud as the deadly billy connected with the back of the man's head, then another as the unconscious guard slipped to the floor.

The valet reached automatically for the billy which was already moving in his direction. Wolsey uncorked the flashlight and a strong beam of light cut through the blackness, hovered for an instant on the marble floor, then swept up toward the right of the Library portals.

"Decent of them to have the book near the door," he remarked, his voice rising to its normal level. "No need to hide now. There's no one else in the building as the relief guard won't return for an hour. Hate to thank the dashed war for the shortage of men—but that's their lookout."

An instant later Wolsey and his valet were standing before the case containing the rare, autographed first edition of Shakespeare's poems, on view for a limited time to the general public. Silently the patient Stover

reached into his overcoat pocket and handed his master a small round-headed jeweler's hammer.

"No time to stand on ceremony," breathed Wolsey. Raising the hammer, he brought it down with a sharp blow on the glass covering the top of the case. The brittle substance gave instantly, tinkling in fragments to one side of the volume. Wolsey reached one hand within and delicately lifted out the ancient book. He returned the hammer to Stover and carefully placed the long thin book in the case strapped under his coat.

"Will we be leaving the way we came, sir?" asked the valet.

Wolsey lit a cigarette. "You should know I never retrace my steps, Stover." He walked leisurely toward the plate-glass portals, throwing a sardonic glance back at the form of the guard crumpled against the wall, examined the lock, and snapped the catch. "We'll leave by the front door."

Behind the departing pair, the heavy doors clicked shut.

"I'll take the coffee now, Stover."

Gregory Wolsey laid down his pen, blotted the notebook in which he had been marking a few notes, and regarded the two Shakespeare volumes lying on the desk in front of him with interest.

He brushed aside the heavy magnifying glass he had used in examining them to make room for the coffee tray the valet placed before him. He picked up a sandwich and gazed reflectively out the window of his penthouse apartment at Manhattan's sunlit towers.

"It's a pity you have no interest in antiques, Stover," he observed. "Take these first edition folios, for instance." He indicated the volumes, while the valet politely stared. "You can't imagine the delight I take in disputing the true identity of Shakespeare with connoisseurs of Shakespeareiana. Most of them are Baconians, maintaining the ridiculous fiction that the

Bard was in reality, Sir Francis Bacon, a writer of the period.

"A few say that Shakespeare was Shakespeare, a stand equally nonsensical, for the very good reason—among others—that it would have been totally impossible for any country bumpkin from the whistle-stop known as Stratford-on-Avon to have accumulated the wealth of knowledge and experience that was the Bard's genius." He took a sip of hot coffee.

"The evidence is clearly against either conclusion." Wolsey glanced blankly at the valet's placid face.

"Now, in my opinion, Shakespeare was Queen Elizabeth. Seriously! Of course you are not interested in the subject, Stover, but you should be. Even an escaped forger whom I so generously rescued from the clutches of the London police should have some deep cultural interest. Develops the mind, sharpens the wits."

He laughed as the valet, industriously dusting bookcases, winced at the reference to his status as a man wanted by the police.

Wolsey laid down the mangled remains of his sandwich. "My interests have developed mine, Stover. In former days I was much as you were, a petty small-time crook contented with a small-time take. Now, a sadder but a wiser man, I hook in bigger hauls. Of course, every now and again I must part with one of my treasures—such as this unsigned copy of the Shakespeare sonnets which I am replacing with the signed one we appropriated last night, and which I will dispose of to Garson, the art dealer, for the goodly sum of \$100,000."

Stover paused as he bent over a mahogany end table with his dust-cloth.

"Did you say \$100,000, sir?" His guileless eyes were indecently wide.

Wolsey, lighting a cigarette, luxuriously stretched as he lolled back in his chair, clad in pyjamas and robe. He nodded. A moment later, the valet left the room.

He returned with a gun.

Stover shot Gregory Wolsey squarely between the eyes. The art collector had time enough to start up violently from his chair as the weapon's muzzle came into his line of vision, but collapsed immediately on the floor like an empty sack of oats.

Ignoring the body, Stover moved rapidly to the desk and scanned the two Shakespeare volumes. One he noted was unsigned. The other was the book filched from the Lorgan Library. For an instant his dreams of wealth went glimmering as he realized the difficulty of successfully disposing of an unsigned copy at top price. Then a grin settled on his countenance.

Going to his room, he returned with a small leather case containing various inks he had used in occasional small jobs of artistic forging for Wolsey. Picking up the magnifying glass, he seated himself at the dead man's desk. After mixing precisely the shade of ink necessary for the work in mind, his eye critically surveying the signature on the book stolen the night before, he carefully copied onto the unsigned title page the signature on the copy belonging to the Lorgan Library.

His intentions were direct. Wolsey's body would not be found for days. The collector and his valet had been known to depart unannounced for long journeys at a moment's notice. With his British accent and polished bearing, Stover should have no trouble representing himself as an English gentleman interested in disposing of an hitherto undiscovered autographed Shakespeare volume. Once having received a check for \$100,000 and cashed it, Canada and safety were only hours away.

A SHORT TIME later he sat in the office of Henry Garson, prominent New York art dealer.

Garson laid down the magnifying glass with which he had been carefully scrutinizing the book and looked up.

"A really remarkable find, Mr.

Stover. Beyond any possible doubt a genuine Shakespeare first edition. Binding, paper, ink, everything checks." He paused. "Bought on the British market?"

Stover glanced at him curiously behind a mask of polite reserve. He had known all along that the signature was not likely to be too closely observed considering the difficulty of comparing signatures four hundred years old, but he was somewhat bewildered at noting that Garson had given the forged signature only a perfunctory glance, examining the rest of the folio with minute exactitude.

"No," he replied finally. "A family heirloom." He took a cigarette from a plain gold case he had appropriated from Wolsey's chest of drawers.

Garson drummed on the desk with his fingers.

"Naturally I am interested." His eyes wandered momentarily to a copy of the morning tabloid lying folded and open to page two on a corner of his desk. "The market price for a signed volume of Shakespeare's sonnets in this condition is somewhere in the neighborhood of ninety or one hundred thousand dollars and the Lorgan Library will probably be anxious to replace the one stolen last night. You are willing to part with it for that sum?"

Stover nodded. He flicked an invisible ash from the lapel of one of Wolsey's suits. "At once. I'm leaving for Mexico this evening. Can you manage an accommodation before then?"

"Of course." Garson picked up the folio, paused a moment, then laid a hand on the tabloid and thrust it under his arm. "If you'll wait here in my office for an hour, I'll write out a draft on my bank for the market price."

While the art dealer was gone, Stover silently congratulated himself.

A half hour went by. Then another. Restlessly Stover helped himself to a cigar from an ornamented box on Garson's desk.

Finally the office door opened and

Garson appeared. Behind him was another man carrying a levelled revolver. Stover jumped excitedly to his feet.

The art dealer moved to his desk as the detective carrying the gun snapped a pair of handcuffs on the ex-valet.

"Rather a daring attempt, Stover. And it might have gone over if the morning papers hadn't reproduced the first page of the book stolen last night from the Lorgan Library." Garson took the tabloid from his pocket.

They'd got him. Stover felt the walls closing in. He didn't know why, yet. They couldn't have found the body so soon, but apparently some theft or other had been discovered. While they were holding him, the murder would come out and then he would be traced back to England as an escaped forger. Forgery, murder, theft. Astronomical figures in terms of prison began looming large in his mind's eye.

Garson was talking again. "As soon as my suspicions were aroused, I traced the volume you offered for sale and discovered that it had been sold in England in 1928, which was the last heard of it. But the thing that really convinced me that something was awry was the fact that that copy was unsigned. Still, even the fact that this one was signed was not important until I noticed that the signature on this book and the signature on the reproduction of the stolen book were precisely the same, couldn't have been told apart by an expert.

"That was your mistake, Stover. I'm assuming you forged the Shakespeare signature yourself, but we can prove or disprove that later. You see, a singular fact about Shakespeare, one that has given rise to many theories concerning his true identity is that although many of his documents in existence have been proven genuine, the signatures on all of them have been totally different."

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Blood Test for a Killer

By
Ted Stratton



Dick Spencer hadn't caught his boss's murderer red-handed. And yet Dick was determined to convict the killer by his bloody hands.

I WAS snipping dahlia cuttings in the lower garden—I'd just finished putting the huge Victory Garden in apple-pie order—when the Old Fox tapped my shoulder. "Want to talk with you, Dick Spencer."

It was an order. When he called me by my full name, it was important. Grant Bertram Dillon, the Old Fox to me since my diaper days on the estate, resembled a member of the vulpine

family. Big ears, long and sharp-pointed nose, bright eyes and lightning brain. He had been a Wall Street big shot before the advent of the S. E. C., but now he lived by the simple process of clipping dividend coupons.

He had perfect white teeth, probably sharp. I'd heard the usual rumors that he'd slaughtered more than one lamb in the Street. Maybe. I didn't know and didn't put much cred-

ence in rumor-mongers' tales. He'd always treated me right since my father died, even lending me money for my two years at the agricultural college. Which made him a right guy in my book.

"At Rutgers," he continued, "weren't you a boxing champion?"

"Light-heavy."

"Guess you can handle yourself, Dick."

Sure of my strength, I bragged. "And how!"

The Old Fox pulled out a fat leather billfold and extracted a sheaf of notes. I nearly had a stroke. The top bill was for one thousand dollars. When he rifled the sheaf, I saw several other big notes mixed with those of smaller denominations. I suppose this was nothing unusual for the Fox. My father said he'd never known a man to carry such wads of currency nor leave it in more obvious places for someone to pick up. Well, it was his money.

"Lately," the Fox explained, "someone's been pilfering cash on me. Not that I mind the money, but nobody is going to outsmart me!"

"Why not call in the police?"

"Can't. It's a family matter. Possibly my man Crokin is the thief"—hastily he added a postscript—"er, borrower. Or a relative. Vander's been drinking heavily and needs cash. So does his sister Fran. As for Elsa—" He slapped the sheaf across one palm. "Step-children," he growled "They don't take after me."

Elsa got into the family by marrying Vander Sands, the Old Fox's stepson. Fran was Vander's sister, which should explain the relative angles. I asked, "What do you want me to do? Hand Vander the old one-two and spank the girls?"

"No fisticuffs, Dick." He was all fox now, crafty eyes, thin nostrils trembling. "Had a talk with my secretary and Jaff suggested we bait a trap. Like this. I'll get a little tight tonight. Crokin will put this roll in my top

dresser drawer—there's ten thousand here—and you'll hide behind a screen. That way we won't need the police."

I thought the plan over. So the bright secretary, Jaff Hollister, had rigged this dodge. "That's nice cheese for a trap," I commented. "What makes you think Crokin will fall for that moth-eaten dodge?"

The Fox barked, "Didn't say it was Crokin."

"Then Fran or Elsa or Vander are too dumb to recognize a trap?"

"They're not servants! And they need cash. I cut off their allowance two weeks ago." His voice became plaintive. "I give them plenty of money. Why must they steal from me?"

I knew the answer to that one. Sure, the Fox was kindly and indulgent, but he always tied a string—maybe a rope—to money. You were made to feel under obligation for any money he handed out. I don't believe he intended it that way. Those high-strung youngsters, bred on profligacy, probably resented the string. If they had had their own bank accounts, I wouldn't have to lose a night's sleep.

"It's your funeral," I said and picked up my dahlia cuttings.

His eyes held mine. "A good-looking man like you, a farmer."

"Horticulturist. And I'm important during the food shortage!"

"You're doing a swell job, Dick, but that's not an explanation. Why are you satisfied with a hundred-eighty a month after college?"

I thought that over slowly. It made difficult explaining. Some people are nuts about rare books. Others—well, I was after a new type dahlia, blue-flowered.

"When I get my dahlia," I explained, "I'll be set. I'm working on cross-pollenization together with the analysis of color composition through aniline dyes. Maybe colorization is affected by chemical salts. It's worth a try and someday I'll have that blue dahlia. And a fortune."

HE SMILED waved an expansive hand at the beautifully shrubbed gardens, the rambling mansion, tennis courts, and various costly accoutrements of a million dollar estate. "I didn't get this trying to corner a dahlia, Dick." He turned away. "See you later."

I stuck my delicate cuttings in sand and went off to get some sleep. Passing near the green-tiled pool, I saw Elsa Sands sunning herself on a deck chair. She had gold hair and green eyes, plus an attractive figure in a swim suit. My pulse quickened when she called, "Come here, Dicky."

"What's up?" I asked.

"Bring me my sun-tan cream, eh?"

"Nix," I said shortly. "I'm a farmer."

I rounded the bath house, crossed the thick turf noiselessly, and skirted a priceless pagoda imported from China at the cost of my salary for the next fifty years. I stumbled against a tall willowy brunette clamped in the arms of a sunburned giant. Fran Sands and Jaff Hollister.

"Oh," Fran said, breath hissing between petulant lips, "Why aren't you with the turnips?"

I grinned and mimicked her English maid. "I know my plyce, mum."

She said something worth a poke in the nose. Hollister took a lazy half-step. "One of these days," he said nastily, "I'll pull little Dicky's ears down over his chest." He pantomimed with his hands. "Like this."

I didn't like Hollister. We'd been snarling and snapping at each other most of the summer. He was too smooth. Toward me he had the grand manner suggestive of bow-low-you-damned-farmer. He couldn't talk to me like that, not any time. I said hotly, "That day, sonny, I'll plant you *under* the turnips."

Now if Fran had not been there, no trouble would have happened. But there she stood, expectant. Hollister moved forward ponderously. "I'll do the job now," he rumbled deep in his chest. He got set a la Jess Willard and

brought up a haymaker. Duck soup. My left flicked out. I crossed my right to his stomach. Jaff sat down hard.

Fran gasped. "Just because you're dad's pet—"

"Want me to kick Jaff's teeth in?"

I strode off. As I stepped through the hemlock hedge screening the garage, a roadster braked to a sharp stop on the gravel. A tall young man, prematurely bald, got out. "Put the car away," he ordered.

Vander Sands. Playboy Vander. The prince in the lordly manner. "I'm the farmer on this estate," I said coolly.

He studied me. "What's biting you?"

"Nothing. I got too much sand in my hair."

I left the car in the driveway and went to my room over the garage. Elsa, Vander, and Fran. Spoiled brats. Tough, worthless parasites, I thought, stretching out on the bed with my clothes on. What they wanted they went after in the direct, arrogant manner of people who knew that money would buy most anything.

Would they steal? Why not? Tough and tricky. Believe me I knew some things about them that the Old Fox didn't suspect. I yawned. Tough, all three of them. I'd better watch my step tonight. I wasn't a detective. Only a farmer, deferred on that account. I yawned—er, horticulturist . . .

I SNEAKED into the Old Fox's upstairs bedroom and hid behind a tapestried screen. A blue-shaded night lamp cast a cone of subdued light over the dresser I had to watch. At exactly 11:51 by the luminous dial on my strap watch, a squat, red-faced servant with sleepy eyes entered. He placed a roll of bills in the top drawer and left. Crokin.

A millionaire's manservant—if he's good, and Crokin was—anticipates every move and whim of his boss. His job offers many temptations, like that wad of bills. But he never takes any chances and plans and smooths the way around the house for the Old Fox.

I walked to the dresser and counted the roll. Seven one-thousand dollar bills, several five-hundreds, and smaller bills made a total of nine thousand, nine hundred, and seventy dollars. Some bait! I wrote the amount in a notebook and drawing a small bottle from my pocket, sprinkled minute darkish crystals over the bills, and returned to my hiding place.

Later, heavy steps sounded on the stairs. Crokin and Jaff Hollister lugged the Old Fox in and undressed him. Smart, this Wall Street tycoon, except for liquor. They put him in bed and left. During the minutes which followed deep satisfying snores filled the room. Then Vander Sands walked into the room. Without once glancing at the recumbent form in the bed, he opened the top dresser drawer and peeled off a bill. He left quietly.

I noted the time—12:42—and made an entry in my book. So that was where petty cash vanished. I hadn't relished this job and right now I hated it. I'd played with Vander when we'd been boys on the estate. I wanted to get out of the house, fast, but I dared not leave until things quieted.

At 12:51 I got a second surprise. Elsa tripped into the room and filched a single bill and swished out.

I wondered, "Where's Fran?" I got the answer at 12:55 when she strode into the room and took her cut. Holy mackerel, they must have been following a time-table!

I didn't like this business. And I wondered if they were entirely to blame. They'd been brought up on over-indulgence and now they must be panicky with their allowances cut off. I decided to put in a good word for them with the Old Fox in the morning.

I was ready to leave when Crokin padded into the room and arranged the coverlet over the priceless Dillon shoulders. He tiptoed to the door and listened carefully. Returning to the dresser, he opened the second drawer about three inches. Then he stripped a bill from the roll and let it flutter

into the opened drawer. Snapping off the bed lamp, he left the room.

A moment later a switch clicked in the hallway and the upper part of the mansion was in darkness.

Smart, that Crokin. You see, he took no chances. Dollars to dill pickles, he knew that Fran, Elsa, and Vander had already been in the roll. So he played it close to the vest. Caching a bill in the second drawer, it would appear that the bill had been dropped by mischance. If it were undiscovered, it was his. If it were missed and then found, he had taken no chance.

The show was over for the evening and not a very complimentary depiction of human nature, either. Waiting fifteen minutes, I crossed to the door and partially closed it. Snapping on the light, I counted the roll. Three bills were gone, all one-thousands. Crokin had been less venal, dropping a five-hundred dollar bill in the second drawer. I left Crokin's loot alone, returned the roll. Walking to the bed, I started to shake the Old Fox's shoulder.

Gentle snores. Rumpled hair, rather thin on top. Wrinkled face. He seemed old, rather tired. There was something pathetic about this gentle old man and his worries. I let him sleep. He was a right guy in my book. As I turned toward the dresser, a slight noise at the doorway caught my attention.

Something puzzling there. Of course. The door had swung back open more than a foot. Had someone watched me? Had Jaff Hollister returned to spy? The door swung open another six inches. A draft of cool air caressed my hot face. Must be an open window somewhere which had blown the door ajar. Quickly I switched off the light, felt my way into the black corridor.

Tentative fingers touched my shirt sleeve. I faced the arm behind the fingers. "Yes?" I whispered.

Crumph! From someone in the corridor the blow came. My knees buckled. Sure, I could take care of myself! I

was a light-heavy—college champ—chump . . .

A LOUD crash brought me to my senses. I was in deep water, fighting for breath. I had to get my head clear. Water choked my mouth. Gasping and sputtering for air, I struggled up, up, up. Fighting desperately I reached the surface and floated. A tall dresser bobbed up and down on a blue sea. But I wasn't in water. I lay on the blue rug in the Fox's bedroom. Someone said, "I'll douse him again, sir."

Water hit my face, ran down my neck, I sputtered, "Stop, Crokin."

I sat up and looked around the brilliantly lighted room. The manservant bent over me, a pitcher in one hand. Beyond him stood Fran Sands wrapped in a hundred dollar negligee. Jaff Hollister posed at her side, immaculate in black pajamas with a writhing, crimson dragon stitched across the front. Vander and Elsa completed the circle.

Trying to rub some sense into my throbbing temples, I said, "I got slugged."

No one answered. Then I saw the revolver in Hollister's hand. Strange—you don't point a gun at a man who's been slugged no more than you club him over the head to get rid of a headache. A queer tenseness gripped them. Their eyes were hard. They watched me like—I fumbled for a word. Like wolves! Crokin's eyes were horrified. His thin lips twitched and he kept watching something behind me.

I stood up, turned. The Old Fox lay on his right side in the rumpled bed. A neat round hole the size of my thumb nail had punctured the base of his head. Drops of blood adhered to his white hair. A bloody trickle had stained the white silk collar of his pajama coat. I faced the others.

"What happened?" I stammered.

Fran's lips were set in a sneer. "You—you murderer!"

"Not me, Fran. Mr. Dillon was alive a moment ago."

Hollister laughed nastily. "What are you doing in this room?"

I stared. "Doing? Why—"

"No clumsy excuses! You tried to steal the bankroll and when Mr. Dillon surprised you, you had to shoot him."

"You had the gun in your hand," Fran interjected. "Jaff took it."

Crokin's voice was cold and distant. "Shall I call the police, Mr. Vander?"

I said, "I had no reason to kill my employer."

"Ten thousand dollars is a reason," Elsa yipped.

"Quite so, madame," Crokin purred smoothly.

"The money," I said, "is still in the top drawer."

I took a swift look. The dresser drawer was filled with handkerchiefs, but the money was gone. Voices babbled.

"Open-and-shut murder," Vander blazed.

"Jaff and I came down the hallway together," Fran shrilled. "Oh, when I saw poor dad—"

"If you will remember," Crokin interposed, "I'd been downstairs cleaning up. When I heard the faint shot, I—"

"Yes, yes," Jaff Hollister said, "I saw you. Now let's get this straight. We—"

I was the only one to keep quiet. I had to think. They were busy getting their stories straight so their movements would dovetail into unbreakable alibis. That way I'd be slated for the chair. I had to do something. Anything to stall for time.

Was Hollister going to double-cross me and tell the police he did not know I had been placed behind the screen by the Old Fox? Was he the killer? Ten thousand dollars was a lot of money.

What about Fran and Elsa and Vander? They had stolen. Had murder followed theft? With Grant Dillon dead they stood to inherit his millions. And a neat motive they'd hung on me. Ten thousand dollars. And everybody knew I was poor.

"Then we agree," I heard Crokin

JDA

say in his most deferential tones. "He learned about the money, came to steal, and ended with murder. The police, Mr. Vander?"

Vander nodded. Neat, any way you looked at it.

Crokin moved toward the door. I said sharply, "Don't phone yet, Crokin."

The manservant stopped, looked at Vander. He puffed up like an enraged pouter pigeon. "I give the orders in this house!"

I took a quick step forward. "You'll listen first. I licked you when we were kids and I can do it again."

Hollister waved the gun. "Step back, Dick!" he snapped.

"Sure." I noted the time on my wrist watch. One-fifty-four. I'd been unconscious for about fifteen minutes. Okay, I'd stall around. Maybe I could get them arguing among themselves and that way I'd get a chance to find the murderer.

I said carefully, "Since 11:30 this evening"—I smiled grimly—"I've been parked behind that screen."

IF A JAP spy had lobbed a hand grenade into the tight circle, there couldn't have been more consternation. Fran's face drained white. Elsa gasped. Vander resembled a fish yanked from the water. Only Hollister took the news quietly. He should have, the louse!

"Will you all listen?" I asked.

Van licked dry lips, squeaked, "Yes, yes. What is it?"

"I was in this room acting on Mr. Dillon's orders. When I left, the money was intact and Mr. Dillon was alive. Then someone slugged me in the hall. Crokin, get a pitcher of water. We've got to find the murderer."

Vander nodded and Crokin left the room, returning almost immediately. He handed me the pitcher. It had a wide mouth and high curving lips. Pale blue, raised figures of dancers ridged the whitish sides.

"You all remember a fellow named William Shakespeare," I said rapidly,

striking while they were off balance. "He wrote a murder mystery, *Macbeth*. Lady Macbeth and her husband, the murderers, tried to frame the king's guards by planting the murder weapons in their hands. But I ask you, who had the most to gain? The guards who lost their jobs by the king's death, or the Macbeths who stood to gain the throne of Scotland? A striking parallel to tonight's murder."

The silence was thick enough to cut with dull scissors. I didn't try, but hurried on. "When the Macbeths went to wash their bloodied hands, they knew that a little water cleansed them of the deed. Only blood doesn't wash off. It won't tonight." I turned to Elsa Sands. "You're first. Put your right hand in the pitcher."

She hesitated, concern on her pert face.

"If you're innocent," I said, "you've nothing to fear."

Slim fingers disappeared within the pitcher, emerged. She uttered a thin shriek of terror. Her entire hand had turned red.

"You had time to kill Mr. Dillon," I said. Her face was as pale as the negligee she wore.

"I didn't kill him. I didn't."

"Perhaps." I wheeled to Fran. "Next."

Fran's eyes clung to Elsa's bloodied hand. "She hated dad! She had no money and dad's death means she is rich. She's the murderess and I needn't take the test."

"You will," I said grimly.

Fran moved on numb legs and, dipping her hand in the pitcher, held it up. She didn't scream. Not hard-boiled Fran. But her hand was red. I misquoted Shakespeare, "A little water clears you of the deed, doesn't it?"

That left Vander. "Fifteen minutes ago," I said tersely, "you didn't have a dime. Now you're a millionaire. Would you be reluctant to take a short-cut to riches? I wonder—"

Vander walked to the pitcher as if

drawn by a powerful magnet. Not a sound in the tense silence except Elsa's pulsing breath, more like sobs. Vander put his left hand into the pitcher. It came out white.

"The right hand," I said. "That's your gun hand."

He thrust in the right hand. It came out bloodied.

"The plot sickens, Vander. Who'd have thought the Old Fox had so much blood in him?"

"It's a trick," Vander stammered. His face was waxen. Sweat coursed in rivulets down his cheeks.

UP UNTIL NOW I'd been stalling. All the while I'd been thinking, turning over the various angles to the murder. I had managed to edge around the circle until I stood close to Jaff Hollister.

No one had moved. They stared at that pitcher with the dancing figurines as if it held some kind of devil's brew, a concoction direct from the Middle Ages which pried loose from a criminal's mind his darkest secrets. Bloodied hands, all three of them. Who had taken the shortcut to Mr. Dillon's wealth?

Fran almost shrieked, "I didn't kill him. I was on the ter—"

I moved. My fist came down hard on Jaff Hollister's wrist. The murder gun dropped to the rug. I kicked it under the bed. If I wanted to leave the room now, I could do so. My fists could get me out. I didn't leave. I stepped back and faced Jaff Hollister.

"Very slick," I said, "your not telling what you knew. Why have you kept quiet and not told why I was in the room? You knew it. Was it you who hid in the hallway and then struck me down so you could steal and murder?"

Hollister straightened until his eyes were a half-head above mine. His body tensed. Sulky lips curled back over even white teeth. Fran moaned, "He didn't do it. He couldn't."

"Then let him take the test," I said. Stooping, I picked up the pitcher of

water and splashed water on his right hand. It did not turn red. "Maybe he's left-handed." I splashed his left hand. It did not turn red.

"The smart guy," I sneered. "He knew enough to wear gloves."

"Damned nonsense," Hollister snapped. But he must have felt the sudden silence my words had produced. He must have noticed the accusing glances. Funny, how everyone steps out from under a murder! Just give them a chance to hang the frame on somebody else.

"Murder will out, Hollister. You got the ten thousand dollars. Now you'll marry Fran and get her share of the old man's wealth. That's why you shot him." My voice rose in a shout. "The frame won't fit me, you louse!"

That did it. He let out a roar of rage. He charged blindly. I dropped the pitcher. The dumb guy hadn't learned about fisticuffs. He had to be shown a second time. I sidestepped his ponderous swing. My left fist snapped his head back. I really tagged him with a right. On the button. Hollister staggered, clawed at the air. His knees sagged. He collapsed on the rug like a wet sack.

I told Vander, "You're the master here. Call the police."

Vander left docilely. Elsa said, "How did you know, Dickey?"

"Elementary. He and Mr. Dillon knew I was behind that screen. The rest was simple. He knocked me out and framed me with the gun." I lowered my voice. "Before the police get here and ask embarrassing questions, get the thousand dollar bill you took. Also the ones from Fran and Vander."

"We didn't really steal the money," Elsa said quietly. "We were going to return it later when we got our allowances back. We wouldn't kill dad."

"I know."

Elsa left the room and I motioned for Fran to go with her. Crokin spoke softly, "I don't understand about the pitcher and the bloodied hands, Mr. Dick. I only put water in the pitcher."

"You're smarter than the others, Crokin."

I grabbed his right hand and rubbed it on the rug where the water from the upset pitcher had spilled. His hand turned red.

"When I was ordered to spy on Mr. Dillon's roll to see who was taking his cash," I explained, "I decided that I'd have to be able to prove who had taken the money. I sprinkled a quantity of methylene dye on the money. Whoever touched the roll got Congo red crystals on his hands. Immerse the thief's—er, borrower's hand in the water and it turned violently red-colored. It did look something like blood."

Crokin's eyes were startled. "Then Miss Fran and the others—"

"I didn't hear what you said," I answered. "I understand, sir." He moved toward the door. "Perhaps I'd better go down, sir, and welcome the police when they arrive."

I quit stalling. "Perhaps," I said shortly, "you'd better fork over that five-hundred dollar bill you parked in the second drawer."

"Bill, sir?"

"You forget that I was behind the screen and saw you drop it into the second drawer. You played safe that way."

CROKIN stared, blinked once. He began to search the rug. He pointed excitedly at my feet. "There's the bill, sir."

Sure enough a five-hundred dollar bill lay behind me on the rug. He retrieved it and handed it over. "Hollister must have dropped it in his haste, sir."

"You're smarter than the rest, Crokin. Hollister isn't the murderer."

"Not the murderer, sir?"

I waved my hands impatiently. "Of course not. That was only a stall. You see, Hollister had a perfect alibi. Besides, how did he know you had hidden the five-hundred dollar bill in the second drawer? Only you and I knew that, Crokin. You'd have saved yourself from the electric chair if you'd

have left that bill in the second drawer."

He stood there stupidly for a moment, not realizing that I had trapped him. Funny how you think you know a man and then the mask drops off. Crokin's eyes flamed. His lower lip parted to disclose clenched teeth. Squat, powerful shoulders hunched. He came at me with a rush.

I had no time to swing my fists. I shoved both hands forward, palms upmost. The heels of my hands caught his chin. I shoved. He staggered back, and, tripping over the recumbent Hollister's feet, fell to the floor. He got up with the pitcher in his hand. Grasping it by the handle, he hurled it at my head. I ducked. The pitcher sailed overhead and then there was a crash and the tinkle of glass where the pitcher struck a window.

I moved in for the kill. I let go with a careful right. I hammered a left against his nose. All the while I kept muttering, "Damn right"—my right caught his chin—"I can"—my left ripped into his eyes—"handle myself"—the left again, the right—"Damn right!" He toppled under the flailing blows. Bloody and bruised, he dropped to the rug, out cold.

Feet pounded into the room. Vander stood, mouth agape. Elsa and Fran crowded into the room. From outside the house came the faint wail of a siren. Hollister stirred, moaned once.

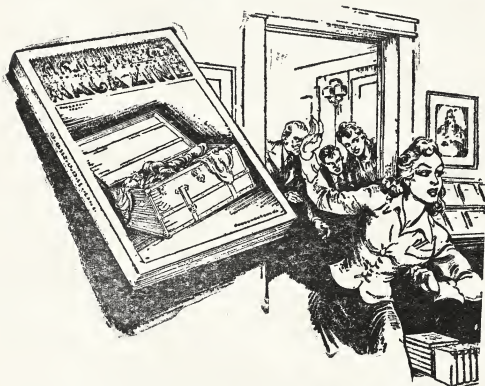
"Throw some water on him," I ordered. "He didn't kill Mr. Dillon. Crokin was the murderer."

Vander wheeled and left the room. Fran came forward, her eyes holding mine. Two feet from me she stopped. She said simply, "I knew it wasn't Jaff. He was with me all the time."

I said dully, "Yes, I know. Your rooms are at opposite ends of the hallway. You were together on the terrace. That's how I knew it was Crokin."

I walked to the side of the bed. Funny, how death equalizes everyone. "I'm sorry I failed you, Old Fox," I whispered. "I warned you it was your funeral, remember?"

The Case of the Crated



Joel Kemp was a detective magazine editor who had met crime only on paper. But when he received a manuscript illustrated by a real corpse, Kemp had to correct that murder story with bullet lead or be erased himself.

CHAPTER I

CORNERED and unarmed, I stood there and waited for the murderer to come to me. Because Janey was so close beside me, I wanted to feel brave this final moment, but I couldn't. Cold sweat was in the palms of my hands. My heart was slugging the walls of my chest. You can't stop things like that when you wait in the darkness for death to come. I was afraid for Janey and I was afraid for myself.

We both heard the faint shoe-scrape

sound on the floor of the next room, where the killer was. Janey's tense fingers bit into my arm. Her whispered words came like a prayer:

"It can't be Lew! Joel, it can't be him!"

I didn't answer, because Lew Harvey was the man Janey loved and had been my best friend. There was no doubt in my mind but that Lew Harvey was the man in the next room, searching inexorably for us with a hungry gun. Too much evidence had piled up against Lew for me to believe otherwise.

Cadaver

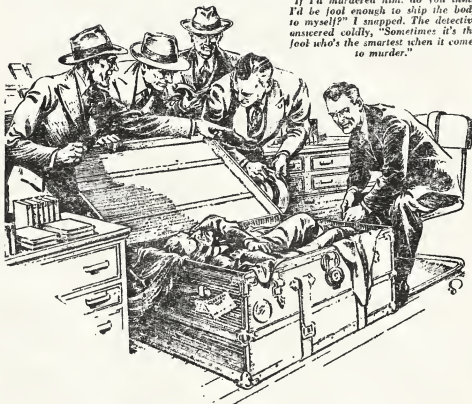
*Sure-Fire Detective
Novellet*

★ ★ ★

By C. William Harrison

★ ★ ★

"If I'd murdered him, do you think I'd be fool enough to ship the body to myself?" I snapped. The detective unscooped coldly, "Sometimes it's the fool who's the smartest when it comes to murder."



After all it was Lew Harvey who had written the crime story that had, too grimly real to be called coincidence, come to life for Janey and me. Lew hated me because he thought I had tried to steal Janey from him; he had threatened me because of that. And the body that had been delivered to my office, throwing me under suspicion of murder just as had been a character in Lew's story, had been shipped by Lew Harvey.

No, as much as I didn't want to believe it, the killer in the next room was Lew Harvey. It could be no one else.

"I'm going out there," I told the girl beside me.

"Don't do it!" Janey whispered. "Don't do it, Joel; he'll kill you!"

"He'll kill us both if we stay here and wait for him."

Janey's kiss was quick and soft and bitterly sweet. I turned away, leaving

her there in the darkness, and felt my way toward the room's only door.

THE story had opened in the typical Lew Harvey fashion, with a neat hooker and as sweet a piece of character introduction as I'd read in weeks. One thing I had to hand Lew Harvey, he could write. He couldn't plot a story worth a tinker, according to 1943 standards, but the guy could write.

I knew he was shooting both barrels at me the moment I opened his envelope yesterday and pulled out the manuscript. His letter of submission, if you could call it that, had been a forewarning. It read:

MR. JOEL KEMP,
Editor, *Sure-Fire Detective Magazine*,
New York City.

Kemp:

If you don't like this story, put your criticism on the back of a check—or else!

HARVEY

Lew had been sore when he visited my office a week ago, after I had bounced his last story. He was a big tweedy man, with features that would make any girl turn and look twice. I didn't blame Janey Daniels for picking him instead of me. I suppose I should have hated him jealously for that, but I couldn't. I had known him too long. He was a likable guy in spite of his touch-and-go temper.

"How come you bounced *Death Is My Debtor*?" he had asked bluntly.

There were tiny dark crowsfeet under his eyes. He had been working too hard and worrying too hard. You can't mix those two in this business and stay ahead. You either work hard and let the future take its course, or you worry hard and watch your writing go to the devil.

"Same reason, Lew," I told him. I knew how he felt. I freelanced before I turned editor and it's a tough racket. One thing though about Lew Harvey, he never counted on my friendship to sell his stories for him. He'd have been disappointed if he had been that

way. Magazines aren't run on friendship.

I added, without trying to soften the hard facts, "The writing was tops, as usual, but the plot was lousy, too old, out of date."

I tried to show Lew where he was out of step, how he should dress up his stories so they would be timely, reflect the impact of war conditions on his characters and fiction situations.

He should have long ago realized everything I told him. Maybe it was pride that had blinded him, or an ego that wouldn't let him admit he was out of date and on the skids; I don't know. I tried every way I knew to help the guy, but I just couldn't put it across. He stood up, and I didn't like the look in his eyes.

"You've said your piece; now I'll say mine," he said in a stiff heady tone. He didn't seem to care much who heard him. The office door was open. Through it I could see Phil Kern and Mark Jardine. Kern was half owner of *Sure-Fire Publications* and had charge of advertising. Jardine was the painter who did most of my magazine covers and was waiting for an interview. They had been talking but now they were silent, listening.

I motioned toward the door, but Lew Harvey ignored it. He had a temper that wouldn't stop once it got started.

"What I've got to say is personal, Kemp, not business," he said loudly. "Your magazine has been my biggest market until recently. Something stinks about you suddenly starting to reject all my stuff. I notice it began about the time Janey turned you down and promised to marry me."

It was the closest I had ever come to swinging on Lew Harvey. "Don't ever say that again, Lew."

He just laughed at me in a hot stinging way and there was no mirth in the sound. It was flat, somehow as ugly as a threat. And Lew could be dangerous if his temper ever got away from him.

"I'll say it any time I feel like it," he

answered harshly. "You know how things stand with me. I need money if Janey and I are to be married. You know it. Maybe that's why you started rejecting all my stuff—to break me and drive Janey back to you. That's what I'm beginning to think, Kemp. If I get any proof, I'll fix you, Kemp; I'll fix you so you'll wish you'd never heard of me or Jane Daniels."

He left my office then. I knew a man who had long been my friend was now very close to being an enemy. If he was not already an enemy.

That had been a week ago . . .

LEW'S next story got off to a swell start, quick and catchy, and I read the first page with a warm feeling of hope that this time he had hit.

Lew put his murder on page one in a situation that would reach out and grab the reader's interest. The lead character was in his office when a large crate was delivered to him. The delivery instruction was, curiously enough, in the lead character's own handwriting, but he knew nothing about the crate or its contents. When he opened it, he found inside the body of a man he knew and hated.

That was as far as I got in Lew Harvey's story. I was finishing that first page when my secretary opened the door.

"There's an express here for you, Mr. Kemp," she told me.

It would be the books I ordered a few days ago, I thought. "Sign for it and have it brought in, Miss Newland."

But when the expressmen entered, they carried a large heavy trunk. They set it on the floor, took their receipt from Miss Newland, and left.

A strange feeling of apprehension came over me as I stared at the trunk. It was as though Lew Harvey's fiction character had come to life in me, with all his feeling of puzzled curiosity. If the address on that trunk was in my handwriting . . .

It was. It hit me like a fist, jarring deep and cold. The delivery instruc-

tions were crayoned on the flat top of the trunk in foot high letters, but still in my own unmistakable scrawl.

Was this some kind of a joke of Lew Harvey's calculated to impress me with his story? I tried to laugh, but the laugh never got out of my throat.

I jerked loose the trunk straps and pushed the sliding key that released the lock. I didn't want to open the trunk, but I knew I had to. I lifted the lid, slowly at first, then rapidly.

Miss Newland screamed.

I cursed.

The body inside the trunk was grotesque in its ghastly cramped position, the face upturned and frozen in death.

The dead man was Phillip Kern, half owner of Sure-Fire Publications.

MY ROOM, clogged at first with office help who had rushed in at Miss Newland's scream, emptied when the homicide squad came. I don't know who called the police; I never once thought of it. I was too preoccupied with adding up what the body in the trunk would mean.

Anyone in the office could identify the address on the trunk as my writing. Everybody in the office knew Phil Kern and I had hit it off none too well the past few months. The police would be quick to make something of that.

They did.

The homicide squad was in charge of Lieutenant John Bills. Bills was a short thin man with a sharp and almost predatory face. He had eyes that were like dark blades gouging into you. I had the chill feeling that he could recognize a lie before it was uttered.

He left his men scattered through the outer office. One of his men cornered Miss Newland and her nervous glance kept shifting away from the detective toward me. She didn't want to answer his questions, but I knew she would. She'd have to.

Lieutenant Bills said nothing further than his name to me. His com-

plete refusal to talk had an ugly way of getting inside me and twisting up my thoughts. His silence was worse, if possible, than a blunt accusation. I tried to draw him out once and failed.

"This is a terrible thing, Lieutenant."

Bills didn't even acknowledge my statement with a nod. He covered every detail of the room with his shrewd dark eyes and there was no expression in his face. The police photographers came in and flashed their pictures. The medical examiner, a stooped gray man, came in and bent over the body in the trunk. Lieutenant Bills bent beside him. I could catch fragments of their low conversation.

"You want him out of the trunk, doc?"

"This guy is past feeling uncomfortable. Let the wagon boys pull him out. He's going to be hard to pry loose from this trunk."

"I want to know what killed him, doc."

"You ought to be able to see that for yourself, John," the M.E. grunted. "The whole back of his head is bashed in. Been dead fifteen to twenty hours. Maybe I can pin the time down closer when I get him on a slab."

I said, with a futile desire to appear helpful, "Are you going to do a post mortem, doctor?"

The M.E. twisted around on his heels and eyed me expressionlessly. "Why?" he asked.

I shrugged. "Well—I don't know. I just thought—"

"He's Joel Kemp, the editor or something," said Lieutenant Bills.

But that meant nothing to the medical examiner. He said, "Sure, I'll do a p.m."

After the M.E. left, the Lieutenant's three assistants came into my office. They didn't get together to compare notes, just stood around and waited for the Lieutenant to open it.

Bills did in a quick flat voice. "All right Mr. Kemp, you can start talking

now. Start at the beginning and tell us all about it."

I said angrily, "I don't like your attitude, Lieutenant. You act like you suspect me of this murder."

Bills showed the faintest ironic surprise. "I do," he said. "You and everyone in New York, Kemp. My men have questioned your office help. Now I want your story."

I BEGAN to see how Lieutenant Bills and his men worked after I started talking. They were like four cogs in a smooth-running and deadly machine. None of them offered the information he had picked up until the time came that it could be used to the most advantage. Probably because I was the one to whom the body in the trunk had been shipped, I knew I was their main suspect. They had me wrapped up before I got started.

I said, "I don't know anything about this. The dead man is Phillip Kern, but I know nothing about his murder."

One of the detectives said, "Kern was half owner of the company, Lieutenant, and there had been some kind of trouble between him and Kemp here."

So that was how they worked, getting the information they wanted by throwing their evidence at me.

"It wasn't trouble," I said, "It was just a difference of opinion, nothing serious. Nothing that would lead to murder. Kern thought we ought to change our fiction policy; I didn't. That was all it amounted to."

Lieutenant Bills' voice was opaque. "Sure, that's all. Who owns the other half of this company?"

I hesitated. I didn't like to answer that question. I didn't have to.

One of the other detectives said dryly, "Kemp does, Lieutenant. It ain't generally known, but Kemp and Phillip Kern were partners. Kern put up the money and fronted as owner of the firm. Kern, here, had the job of running the magazines." Then he added, "Now that Phillip Kern is dead, Kemp

the sole owner of a business that's worth a nice chunk of lettuce."

I knew then where I stood in this case. They had little evidence yet, but I was nailed to the wall and I knew it. The fact that I took over complete ownership of the publishing company was motive enough for them. Kern and I having been at odds added to their case against me. I wondered with a stab of bitter desperation if this was where Lew Harvey had planned to put me.

The thought of Lew was like a cold finger prodding my brain. Lew knew the setup between Kern and me. He had the imagination to hatch up such a frame as this. The fact that he thought I was trying to take Janey from him made me even more certain he had planted this murder on me.

I remembered phoning Janey the night before to ask how Lew was coming along with his work. They had quarreled that day, she told me, and in the heat of their argument she had given him back his ring. Lew had sworn to get me if anything happened between Janey and him. The more I thought of it, the more certain I was that it was Lew Harvey who had put me in this spot.

"Look here," I protested. "You're trying to pin this on me just because I happened to be Phil Kern's partner."

"Money and murder have dissolved more than one partnership," Lieutenant Bills said.

"All right, so what if it has?" I snapped. "The body was shipped here to me, dammit! If I'd murdered him, do you think I'd be fool enough to ship the body to myself?"

Bills shrugged. One of his men said, "The shipping directions on the trunk are in your writing. Half of your office staff told me that."

"It was forged," I argued. "I didn't write that. Do you think I'd be fool enough—"

Bills cut in coldly, "Sometimes it's the fool who's the smartest when it comes to murder. You never know

what will come out of a killer's mind, let alone the mind of an editor or writer. This is just screwy enough—and maybe smart enough—to be a frame on yourself in order to throw us off the track. I don't take any chances in my business."

I said, "Then you're taking me in."

He nodded, "On suspicion, Kemp. We hold you until we've checked on who bought that new trunk and a few other points. After that if it still adds up to you—" He shrugged grimly.

"I'll get my hat," I said.

Lieutenant Bills didn't send one of his men with me when I went into the outer office. Every eye in the room was on me and I tried to appear casual. I nodded at Mark Jardine who was sitting at one side, a camera case slung as usual over his shoulder. A paper-wrapped magazine cover painting, brought in for my okay, was on the floor beside Jardine's chair. His face was both curious and strained.

I said, "I'll have to look at that later, Mark."

I went past him and into the room where I kept my hat. I got my hat, but I didn't turn back to the main office where the homicide men waited. I went out the door at the end of the room and started down the stairs, moving fast now, running.

CHAPTER II

JANEY DANIELS said, "Joel, you were a fool to run away."

I didn't answer her. We were in Janey's coupe, going up Seventh Avenue toward Lew Harvey's place. My eyes were on the rear view mirror, but if we had a tail the guy was too smart for me.

"Lieutenant Bills had nothing against you that would stand in court," Janey went on. "He gave you that chance to escape just to see if you would take it."

"I know that," I told her. "Two of Bills' men began trailing me the instant I left the building. They were plenty tough to lose."

"*Maybe* you lost them," Janey said skeptically.

"I did. I didn't born yesterday."

"No," she agreed. "It was the day before yesterday."

I let it drop there; it was getting us no place. I didn't blame her for feeling as she did. Running from Lieutenant Bills had been practically an admission of guilt, but I was nagged by the belief that if anyone was to pin down the real killer it would have to be me.

After losing the two detectives tailing me, I had gone first to Mark Jardine's combined living quarters and studio in the Village, thinking I would be safe there while I figured things out.

But Jardine hadn't yet returned from my office as I'd hoped. His door was locked and there was a letter in his mailbox. It had been forwarded from some post office box in Whitehall or White Plains—I wasn't sure where. I only noticed it vaguely as I turned away from the door.

Janey picked me up in her coupe as I left Jardine's flat.

"I thought I'd catch you here," she said. "It was the nearest place you could come from your office." She said Mark Jardine had phoned her about Phil Kern's murder and that I had slipped away from Lieutenant Bills' men. "He told me to tell you what kind of a fool you were for running away. Joel, you've got to go back."

I refused, watching the street nervously. "I didn't kill Kern, but I couldn't prove that in jail. My only hope is to stay free long enough to clear myself."

"Then I'll go with you," Janey said. She was a slender girl, with that particular kind of tall quiet beauty that I admire most. She could be stubborn when she wanted to. She was now. I had known her from way back, and if ever I needed a friend it was now. But I didn't want to drag Janey Daniels into this.

"You'll be aiding a man who is

wanted by the law," I told her bitterly.

"Get in," she said.

So now we were driving toward Lew Harvey's place. She turned off Seventh on Lew's street.

"Lew and I quarreled yesterday," she answered my question, "over nothing important. For the past week he's been acting as though he wanted a fight, always bringing you up in an insinuating way. He seemed jealous of you, suspicious for some reason, and sore. Yesterday I told him he was blaming you for his own mistakes in his stories. One thing led to another. We quarreled and I gave him back his ring."

"Yesterday Phil Kern was murdered," I said.

SHE stopped the coupe and we got out. Rain clouds were clotting in the sky, bringing early darkness. Janey punched the doorbell, but no one answered. I tried the knob and the door opened easily. We entered. I called for Lew, but got no answer.

"He's out," Janey said. And she added, "I still can't believe Lew murdered Phil Kern."

Lew Harvey had the corner apartment in a large brownstone that fronted on Guilford Street, with a private front entrance and a side door that led to the garages. At the far end of a hallway, I could see the side door half open. There was a lingering smell of tobacco smoke in the air.

"He saw us drive up and ducked out the side door," I said to Janey. "He's probably calling the cops by now."

Janey faced me angrily. "Stop talking that way about Lew! He wouldn't do that, Joel." But she betrayed her doubts in her next words. "You ought to go someplace else. Joel."

"I want to look around here first."

Being both writer and male bachelor made Lew Harvey's study doubly disheveled. There were books and dog-eared magazines here and there near reading chairs, and the ash trays were

full. Crumpled pages of bond and yellowed were on the floor near the target they had missed, the wastebasket.

I saw Janey grimace, but for me it was a masculinely pleasant room, well-lighted and roomy, with its oak-paneled walls and its atmosphere of careless comfort. Lew's desk angled the room's corner between two large windows, and I moved to it.

The typewriter on the desk was a black island surrounded by reference books and pencil-scarred manuscripts that I had rejected in the past, a litter of pipes, and a much dented bronze humidor. The typewriter held a page of defense bond slogans and poster ideas on which Lew had been working as a contribution to the war effort. I found the carbon copy of the story Lew had submitted to me in the afternoon mail.

Janey said from across the desk, "What do you expect to find here, Joel?"

To answer her, I read aloud the first page of the manuscript. When I finished, I looked up and saw how much my reading had hit home. Her mouth was pale-pinched. There was strain around her eyes.

"That's just—it's just coincidence," she tried to argue.

I laughed bitterly. "Like the sun coming up every day is coincidence," I said.

"But Lew wouldn't—he couldn't kill—I just can't believe it about him."

"You mean you don't want to believe it about Lew," I told her bitterly. "Dang it, Lew was my friend for a long time and I don't want to believe it either. But Lew was sore at me. He swore he'd get me if anything happened between you and him. Jardine, Phil Kern, half of my office force heard him say that last week.

"Lew wrote this story, sent it to me. It's beyond any stretch of coincidence that another man, the killer, could have happened on the same murder situation to frame me. For that matter who besides Lew Harvey had any reason to hate me?"

She didn't answer that. She said slowly, as though her words traveled a single thread of hope, "Maybe someone copied Lew's fiction murder in order to frame Lew with framing you. What I mean is—"

"I know what you mean." What she meant was that the killer had purposely patterned his murder of Phil Kern after Lew's fiction situation in order to make the police think first that I had killed Kern, and then later that Lew was guilty and had tried to frame me.

It seemed fantastic, but it made sense. It was a possibility. After all the police had nothing against me that would stand in court. Unless they could prove, which was doubtful, that I had bought the trunk Kern's body had been shipped in.

I said grimly. "I hope you're right for Lew's sake."

She was wrong.

I FOUND the sales ticket for the trunk in the bottom of Lew's wastebasket. Why he had not destroyed this damning piece of evidence, I did not know. He must have been very sure of himself or preoccupied with other details of the murder. I showed it to Janey and her face went white. She said nothing. There was nothing now that she could say.

"We won't jump at anything until we're certain," I said. "I'm going to check this."

I picked up the phone, called the luggage company whose name was on the sales ticket. I asked for a description of the man who had bought the trunk. When I set down the phone there was no longer room for doubt in my mind.

"The trunk was ordered over the phone," I told Janey. "The luggage people were told to deliver the trunk to the corner of Fifty-seventh and First Avenue. There they were met by a boy who paid them in cash. That's all they know about it, except that the trunk was to have been

picked up by the purchaser shortly afterward."

I followed through, bitter with the certainty that was piling up inside me against Lew Harvey.

"It can only add up one way," I said. "Phil Kern's body was shipped in the trunk and the man who bought it was Kern's killer. Even if the luggage people can't identify the man who bought the trunk, the sales ticket was found here in Lew's wastebasket. So it has to be Lew."

Janey was hurt, hurt to the core, and the horror was in her eyes. "To think that Lew could ask Mr. Kern to come here, all the while deliberately planning to—to—"

"Easy, honey," I said.

She gave me a thought. If Phil Kern had been murdered here and that must have been how it was, what had Lew used for a weapon? The brief view I had got of Kern's head indicated something flat and heavy had been used. Something like the butt of a gun.

I was looking at two ancient .44 Colts hanging in belt holsters between the windows behind Lew's desk. He had kept them there just for atmosphere. Lew had a standard story of those guns for gullible visitors.

"Those hoglegs used to be owned by Billy the Kid," he'd say. "See those notches on the butts? Twenty-one of them, one for each year of the Kid's life. I picked them up down in New Mexico from an old-timer who intimated that he was the Kid himself, living under another name."

The truth was Lew had bought those guns in a local hock shop and had notched the butts himself. But either of those old Colts would make a deadly weapon if clubbed down on the back of a man's head.

I lifted one of the guns out of its holster, pulled the drapes over the windows, and clicked on the desk light. Janey moved around the end of the desk, looked over my shoulder intently as I examined the weapon. It was clean except for a thin brown

stain of color in the crack of the butt plate.

Janey looked up at me and said in a small voice, "Joel, is it—blood?"

"I think so. It looks like it. If it is, Lew missed it when he wiped the gun butt clean."

There was one fairly certain way of learning whether a gun butt had been used on the back of Phil Kern's head, but I had another call to put through first. I phoned the express company.

"This afternoon you delivered a large trunk to Joel Kemp, at the office of Sure-Fire Publications. Will you check your records and tell me where that trunk was picked up?"

The answer I got was a duplicate of the one I had from the luggage people. The trunk had been left in the charge of a small boy, who had paid the expressman the delivery charges. That was all there was.

AFTER I broke the connection I phoned the medical examiner. I didn't offer to identify myself and tried to make my voice sound official.

"Can you tell yet the general shape of the weapon used to kill Phillip Kern?"

The M.E. hesitated a moment, uncertain.

"Dammit, man, I asked you a question!" I snapped in the phone. "Do you know yet or don't you?"

He answered quickly enough, but still uncertainly.

"Of course I know! That's my job, ain't it? At least I have an idea. Kern was killed by several blows on the back of the head. A flat oval-shaped object, roughly two inches long."

"Like the butt of a pistol?"

"Yes. Or something similar. Who is this?"

"Have you finished the post mortem yet?"

"No, I haven't finished it. Kern ain't the only stiff I've got to keep me busy. But I've got a man working on him. Who—?"

"Has he reported anything yet?"

"He told me Kern's stomach was full of a solution that was analyzed as sodium borate. I don't get it. Why would anyone want to drink a stomachful of borax? And I'd like to know who—"

"Is that all he found out?"

"Yes. And it's probably all he will find out. Kern was killed by blows on the base of his skull. Now who are you?"

"Lieutenant Bills," I said.

The medical examiner yelled in the phone. "The devil you say! Lieutenant Bills is right here—"

I hung up.

I looked at Janey and said, "That was the medical examiner I was talking to. He said the murder weapon used on Phil Kern was shaped like the butt of a pistol. He said they found a solution of borax in Kern."

Janey said, "Borax? Why would Mr. Kern drink borax?"

I said I didn't know. It didn't make sense to me why Phil Kern had drunk a solution of borax just before he was murdered.

"It's something to ask Lew Harvey when we find him," I told her.

It was then that I heard the noise, a low whispery sound like that of a shoe sole scuffing the nap of a rug. I looked around startled, hunting the source of the sound; I heard the sharp pull of Janey's breath as we saw the man watching us from the shadowed mouth of the hallway across the room.

"Why don't you ask me now?" Lew Harvey said harshly.

CHAPTER III

WE STOOD THERE. Janey Daniels and I, staring across the room at Lew Harvey; I, startled and beginning to feel a hot shove of anger through my body; Janey, pale and frightened and hurt.

The desk lamp, shaded as it was, didn't quite reach its light across the room. Lew loomed tall and powerful in the half-darkness of the hall. Temper was in his face, a bitter, implacable

flush that was reflected in his burning stare at us. His wide mouth was hard-pressed, and white at the edges.

His shoulders were hunched slightly forward and his right hand was thrust deep into his coat pocket as though he gripped something in there. I wondered if it was a gun and if that dent in the front of his coat pocket was not the muzzle snouting toward Janey and me.

He must have silently entered the hall through the side door when Janey and I first went to the desk. I had a feeling he had overheard everything; then came the thought, oddly without fear at first, that he couldn't let us go on living, knowing what we did about him.

"So you've got me for Phil Kern's murder!" Lew said harshly.

Janey said in a hurt whisper, "Oh, Lew—why, Lew? Why did you do it?"

He laughed at her, a savage throaty sound. It was a flat ugly sound that scratched along my nerves. I shifted my hand away from the telephone on his desk, touched a heavy metal paperweight. I thought, *I'll throw it if he tries to shoot.*

I said quietly, "You'd better come along with us, Lew."

His voice lunged back at me. "Do you think I'll let you take me in for Kern's murder?"

"I'm going to take you in, Lew."

"All you'll take is a lot of trouble on yourself. I came in just after you got here. I heard everything you found out about me and Kern's murder. I'm getting out of here and you won't stop me."

Janey said pleadingly, "Don't make it worse for yourself, Lew. I'll do everything I can for you."

He started backing away down the hall, toward the side door. I moved around the end of the desk, still keeping my hand on the paperweight. Lew halted and his hand in his coat pushed out threateningly toward me.

I threw the paperweight at him. Lew dodged to one side. The weight

struck the wall, crashed against the end of the hall. Lew didn't try to escape when I lunged toward him.

It was a foolish thing for me to do, rushing Lew Harvey. He had all the advantage of height and weight, and I had never been much in a fight. I hit him but I didn't have it in me to do much damage. He shook off the blow as though it had annoyed him more than hurt.

Lew shoved me back, then caught me with a curving left. Janey screamed, thin and short. The kick of a mule was in Lew Harvey's blow and I went down. That was all there was to the fight. Lew was gone when I got back on my feet.

Janey cried in my ear, "Joel, we've got to stop him!"

A MOTOR kicked into life in the driveway alongside the apartment. Tires skidded on pavement, into the street. I ran to the front door with Janey close behind. Outside, in the early darkness, we could see the tail-light of Lew Harvey's sedan speeding down the street. I pushed Janey into her coupe.

"Try to keep him in sight."

We almost lost him when he turned into Seventh Avenue, but we picked him up when he turned off on another street. He seemed to be heading west, toward the wealthy Riverside Drive district. We lost him in the traffic near the north end of Central Park and a hopeless look came into Janey's face.

"Drive around a while," I told her. "Maybe we can pick him up again."

We spotted Lew's familiar black sedan parked at the curb two blocks down the street. I got out, looked into the sedan, then turned back to Janey.

"He ran out of gas," I said. "It's one thing we can thank restricted mileage for." For a moment I sat there in the coupe beside Janey, trying to reason out Lew Harvey's escape from us. Lew's flight seemed more than that of a murderer wanting only to escape capture. He had driven as

though he had some definite place to go before he made a complete getaway, some last job to do.

"He must have taken a bus when his car ran out of gas," Janey said.

"I don't think so," I reasoned. "He acted as though he had something important to do, some place to go after he broke out of his apartment. He didn't try hard to lose us in the traffic. He must have known we were following. He knew he was short of gas and was trying to stretch it out as far as possible."

I added, "Phil Kern lived on Riverside Drive, not far from here. Maybe that's where Lew was heading. It's worth a try."

"We ought to call the police, Joel."

"There's no time for that."

We drove to Phil Kern's home. It was a huge old brick and stone building, but it looked what it stood for—wealth. Dark now, it sat far back on a beautifully landscaped lawn, approached by a crushed stone drive that curved through flanking evergreens. There was something ominous in the complete darkness of the place.

Janey parked at the curb and cut the coupe's lights. We climbed out and I said, "The police will have a guard somewhere on the grounds. I'll get him to help."

Janey was slender and straight beside me. There was a warm fragrance in her hair so close to my face. She was everything a man could want in a woman, beauty, strength, honesty; mentally I cursed Lew Harvey for what he had done to her.

She touched my arm with the tips of her fingers. "Joel, I want you to know this. No matter what Lew did, I still love him. I guess it'll always be that way."

I said quietly, "Thanks for keeping me straight, Janey. I might have gone overboard with the hope that maybe you and I—" I didn't finish that. I started to turn away.

Janey said, "I'm going with you, Joel."

Something half anger and half bit-

terness broke loose in me. "There's nothing you could do," I said. "It would be a useless risk of your life. You won't mean anything to Lew Harvey when he's cornered. He's a killer, Jane, and he'll murder again."

"I'm going with you, Joel."

WE WENT across the Kern lawn, keeping to the shrubbery as much as possible to avoid being seen by anybody in the house. There was traffic on the street behind us but those sounds seemed distant and meaningless. Danger that was close, even though unseen, wrapped an odd feeling of utter silence around us and the big house we were approaching.

I kept searching the darkness for the police guard who must have been stationed here after Phil Kern's death, but I could see none. The place seemed utterly empty; yet, like a current flowing from the house, there was a dark and hidden danger that I could almost taste and smell.

Janey whispered, "I thought I saw a small light in there—it was gone before I could be certain—like a flash-light in Mr. Kern's art gallery."

We found the police guard face down in the shrubbery beside the veranda. I knelt briefly, exploring the man with my hands. I straightened grimly.

"He's not dead, but he'll be unconscious for hours. This is where Lew was heading when we lost him."

The front door was open. I didn't like to take Janey inside with me—I didn't like to go in myself—but it was too late to turn back now.

It gave me a strange feeling to enter the house like this, silently, afraid of what I knew was here but could not see. Always before, when we had come here, Lew, Janey and myself, Mark Jardine, and others close to my magazine, the house had been a place of bright and cheerful luxury.

Phil Kern had money and he had enjoyed spending it. His parties were things to remember; his art gallery in the north wing of the house was some-

thing of which he was more than proud, even though he had known little about the masterpieces he owned. Mark Jardine had been Kern's agent and adviser on the paintings he bought.

My fingers made a papery sound on the wall inside the door.

Janey whispered, "If you turn on the lights, he'll see us."

"I'd rather be able to see him than wonder where he is and when he'll strike," I answered tensely.

I punched the button. But the lights didn't come on. Lew had taken the precaution of pulling the main electrical switch after entering the house, to give himself the protection of darkness in case someone came before he was finished.

We began groping our way silently from room to room, searching for the man we were afraid to meet. We came to the north wing that housed Phil Kern's gallery of paintings and we both heard the sound that came through the closed door. It was a low hissing noise, like air or gas escaping from an open vent.

I felt for the knob and opened the door quietly. Instantly I caught the faint smell of gas. The smallest stub of a candle was burning on the near end of the mantle over the fireplace built into the side wall.

The candle spread its yellow light across the paintings that hung on the wall over and on either side of the gas fireplace. A Van Gogh that Kern had had Mark Jardine buy for him only a few weeks ago was directly above the fireplace, vivid in its coloring and light effects even in the flickering glow of the candle.

But the two Thomas Gainsboroughs that had originally hung on either side of the Van Gogh had been replaced by paintings by lesser artists. Why Lew Harvey had done this, I did not know.

But I understood the purpose of that candle burning on the end of the long mantel; I understood the meaning of the gas leaking from the open cock in the fireplace grate. I under-

stood the whole thing as I saw the dark shape of the man straighten from the gas grate.

For some reason—either to destroy evidence or because of some ruthless hatred for Phil Kern and everything Kern owned, the man had opened the grate cocks so that the house would be fired when the gas was thick enough in the room to reach the candle flame.

I WOULDN'T have done what I did if I had realized the chance I was taking. The man by the fireplace hadn't seen us and the candle on the mantel was no more than a dozen feet distant.

I took a long step forward, took off my hat, and sent it spinning toward the candle. The flame blacked out. The man by the fireplace cursed, a startled deadly sound. He jumped back away from the rising fumes of gas. I should have known then what his intention was—to be able to shoot without igniting the gas.

I started toward him and in the darkness hit an unseen chair. An orange pencil of light stabbed at me and I heard the muffled clap of a silenced gun. The bullet was like an invisible finger jerking lightly on the sleeve of my coat.

Janey cried out, "Lew—don't shoot, Lew!"

I picked up a chair and hurled it at the killer, then whirled and carried Janey through the door with me. I caught her arm and pushed her across the room ahead of me.

We stumbled into a hall and Janey turned toward the front door.

I said, "No. He'll count on us going that way. We wouldn't have a chance. He's got a gun and he'll use it."

So we dug deeper into the house. It became a deadly game of darkness, silence, and strain. We could hear the killer behind us, methodically, ruthlessly searching for us. He was like a hunter relentlessly driving his prey before him, until at last his prey was cornered and unable to escape.

It was like that with Janey and me.

We fled from room to room trying to be silent, but unavoidably making some sounds as we struck unseen furniture in the darkness. He gave us no chance to unlock the windows and raise them. He was always too close, never more than two rooms behind us.

He used his familiarity with Kern's house to drive us inexorably in the direction he wanted. He never gave us the opportunity to double back on him. I had the chill feeling we were doing just what he wanted when at last we were forced up the rear stairs to the second floor.

The slow black silence was like blades screwing down on our nerves. I wanted to break and run—Janey wanted to run—anything to get away from the gun relentlessly following us, but we knew that would be the next thing to suicide.

On this second floor, I was in a part of the house that was strange to me. I tried to work our way to the front stair landing, but somehow I missed. Or the killer forced me to miss the stairs.

We were somewhere in the south wing, in a bedroom where the air was hot and stale behind closed and draped windows. I could hear the murderer inexorably searching the room just beyond the one we had left. I heard as though from a great beckoning distance the sounds of traffic on the Drive, the shrill barking of a dog in the darkness of the night outside.

I heard the creak of a door opening into the room next to ours, the killer coming closer.

I whispered to the girl beside me. "Help me find a door, Janey. We've got to get out of here."

"There is no other door," she said. "There is no other way out."

CHAPTER IV

SO WE stood there, cornered, no longer able to escape. How much time had passed since Janey and I had found Lew Harvey's abandoned sedan,

I did not know; perhaps an hour—perhaps only minutes.

Everything in my mind was lost to the death that was relentlessly drawing closer to us in the darkness, the killer who was quietly and methodically searching the next room.

I was afraid, but not so much for my life. Oddly enough, my own safety seemed small and inconsequential, but that wasn't because of bravery. I didn't want to die any more than any man wants to die, but I knew fear in the thought that the girl beside me soon would die. The thought of every good thing that was Janey Daniels being extinguished by a killer's ruthlessness was a thing that I couldn't believe or let myself believe.

"I'm going out there," I said. "I don't know what I can do, but if I can get close enough to Lew Harvey—" I didn't finish because I had nothing more to say. All I hoped for was to keep Lew occupied long enough for Janey to get out of the house.

I moved toward the closed door with her kiss still warm on my mouth. I made no sound as I opened the door. I moved into the darkness of the next room, paused listening for a sound that would give me the direction of the murderer.

I heard it, the low scrape of shoe leather on the floor across the room. I started in that direction, slowly and without sound, searching with eyes that were useless in the darkness.

I was looking toward the wall where I thought the murderer would be, but the man I saw moved toward me from another angle. I made out his shape just before his outthrust hand touched my shoulder.

I swung on him with everything I had and felt slivers of pain shoot up my arm. The man went down, dragging me with him. From the corner of my eye as we fell I saw the stabbing fingers of flame and heard the clap of a silenced gun from the wall at one side.

Then the killer was over there after all! I heard the man under me curse

savagely in a familiar voice, "Dammit, get out of the war!"

I rolled free and dived frantically toward the man who was using the silenced gun. I missed him in the darkness and my shoulder struck the wall, but my outstretched arm caught him around the neck.

I twisted around and pulled myself in close to the killer, groping wildly for the hand that held the gun. I knew by sound rather than sight that the third man, whoever he was, was lunging toward us.

I heard the fleshy impact of a fist against bone and the killer sagged loosely in my arms. I let him fall. I straightened, breathing heavily.

"Well—" I began.

THEN something hit me and that was all I knew. When I opened my eyes, the room was bright with light. Janey was bending over me, with Lew Harvey standing just behind her.

"I couldn't tell who was who in the darkness, so I didn't take any chance," Lew said. "Sorry I had to bust you, Joel."

Surprise cleared my brain and I sat up quickly. All the time I had thought Lew Harvey was the murderer, but now—I didn't know what to think.

"I didn't know anything about Kern's murder until I overheard you and Janey talking in my apartment," Lew said. "You were piling up evidence against me, but I knew the killer had to be someone else. I broke away from you in my apartment so I'd be free to use the evidence I'd heard you give and track down the real murderer. What I found out led me here to the murderer who framed you and me, Joel."

Lew pointed. I looked. The man, bound and still unconscious, was Mark Jardine.

Janey said, "Lew was trying to get to Jardine's place when we were chasing him. He ran out of gas and took the bus. We thought he had come here, when actually it was Mark Jardine."

I still didn't get it until Lew explained.

"Jardine had planned for some time to murder Phil Kern. He decided to use my quarrel with you to protect himself," Lew said. "He was at my place several times while I was working on the story I sent you, and decided to copy my fiction situation in his actual murder. It was Jardine who bought the trunk and hid the sales ticket in my wastebasket.

"He's the one who put some of Kern's blood on the butt of that old Colt pistol of mine. He wanted to frame me for Kern's murder, so it would look like I'd attempted to frame you. I doubt if he seriously wanted either of us convicted, but he wanted to tangle up things for the police so he wouldn't be suspected."

I broke in, puzzled. "But my handwriting was on the trunk that Kern's body was shipped in."

Lew Harvey frowned slightly. "Is that right? You didn't mention that in my apartment. But forging your handwriting on the trunk would be easy for Jardine. He was around your office enough to steal some paper on which you'd written your name and address. He must have done that, copied it with his camera, then projected the negative onto the trunk through his enlarger, so he could forge your blown-up writing on the trunk top with a crayon."

That was how Jardine must have done it. He was always carrying a camera around with him and he had a well-equipped darkroom in one end of his studio. Such photographic forgery would have been a simple thing for Mark Jardine.

"But why did Jardine want to murder Phil Kern?" I asked.

"I didn't know the reason for that until I got to Jardine's studio after breaking away from you," Lew answered. "Until then all I had to point to Jardine as the murderer was the bowax solution I heard you say the medical examiner found in Phil Kern's stomach. I knew Jardine often used

such a solution in photographic developers. Kern must have drunk it, knowing he was going to be murdered and powerless to prevent it, in order to leave us a clue to his killer."

"You still haven't told why Jardine murdered Kern?" I reminded.

"Because Jardine cheated Kern out of a pile of money," Lew said. "Jardine, you remember, acted as agent and adviser for Kern when Kern bought his Van Gogh painting a few weeks ago from someone in the north part of the state. Actually, Jardine sold Kern a cheap Van Gogh copy he had made or bought. Kern wasn't expert enough to know the difference, but after the deal was completed, Jardine became afraid Kern would sooner or later catch on. So the answer was murder.

"Jardine invented the name of the man Kern thought he was buying from. He rented a post office box in the town upstate, afterwards giving the post office his own address here. When Kern wrote to the supposed Van Gogh painting owner upstate, his letters were actually being forwarded to Mark Jardine down here. I found Kern's last letter in Jardine's mailbox this evening. That's what gave me Jardine's motive for murder."

Janey said to me, "We should have known it was Jardine when we saw him in the gallery downstairs. He was fixing things for a gas explosion that would destroy his fake Van Gogh, but he had replaced the Gainsborough masterpieces with two less valuable paintings. He intended for the fire to be discovered before it spread too much. He wanted to protect the masterpieces if possible. That was the artist in him; we should have known Lew wouldn't have worried about what paintings were destroyed."

Lew grinned at Janey, "You do me an injustice, lady. I love all beautiful things, including you."

IN MY office the next day I finished reading the story Lew had submitted. He had done a swell job on it,

swallowing his pride and writing the way today's public wants their stories written, vivid, timely, human. I was glad to send Lew a check for the story, at the usual rate of course, instead of a rejection slip.

But the following day's mail brought the check back to me. With it was a neatly printed paper, patterned after a Sure-Fire Publications rejection slip.

It read:

We regret very much to advise you that your submitted material has been found unavailable. We are herein returning it to you.

However, we feel that if you would care

to make a revision, raise the word rate of this check, the undersigned will be glad to receive it again, with thanks.

You can't blame an editor for trying, can you? Business is business. Speaking from the editorial side, a standard word rate for a story is better than a bonus rate, even if the story is worth it.

Lew got his bonus rate all right, because he and Janey Daniels ganged up on me. Their note, rejecting my first check was signed, "Mr. and Mrs. Lew Harvey." There was a postscript from Janey that added, "But definitely!"



WARNING from the FBI

The war against spies and saboteurs demands the aid of every American.

When you see evidence of sabotage, notify the Federal Bureau of Investigation at once.

When you suspect the presence of enemy agents, tell it to the FBI.

Beware of those who spread enemy propaganda! Don't repeat vicious rumors or vicious whispers.

Tell it to the FBI!



J. Edgar Hoover
J. Edgar Hoover, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation

The nearest Federal Bureau of Investigation office is listed on page one of your telephone directory.

A Trap for Hair-Trigger Harris

By Robert Turner



Hair-trigger Harris believed in shooting first when dealing with gunmen. But when he walked into that murderer's trap, Harris knew his only chance for life was to hand that killer his gun.

HARRIS sat in the bedroom of his flat, a big hulk of an ex-cop in a baggy suit that hadn't been pressed in a month and a half. Heavy blond stubble fringed his face.

His eyes were red-rimmed and bleak. A quart of whisky sloshed in his stomach, but he wasn't drunk. That was the trouble. He couldn't get drunk anymore. He couldn't even get mad.

It didn't seem like forty-five days since he'd handed in his badge and his gun and his resignation. It seemed like forever. Living in hell can do that to a man.

At first, the newspapers riding him, calling him "Hair-trigger" Harris, made it easy to lose himself in anger. He could always find some cheap crook or grifter with a perverted sense of humor. It helped to wallop the willies out of the guy. Or he could just drink himself silly, blank out.

Now the newspapers had forgotten the thing and the punks in town had learned that it wasn't healthy to rile Harris even though he'd lost his authority. The liquor didn't work any more, either. It only sharpened his loneliness and self-hatred.

He got up, moved toward the window, pushed back the dingy curtains, stared dully down at the street eight floors below.

He thought about Laura Knight. Right now, probably, she was out with Leo Damon, her dapper little shyster of a boss. She would be smiling up at him through those soft brown eyes of hers.

Harris bunched his shoulders, heaved the window wide. He stooped and leaned dangerously far out. . . . Then the clang of the phone throbbed in his ears, and the little bell clapper seemed to drum against his very brain, beating out all his thoughts. He wheeled from the open window, walked through to the hall, picked up the instrument.

"What is it?" he said hoarsely.

"Harris? Leo Damon speaking." The criminal lawyer's voice trebled nervously. For a moment Harris' heart spun. Something must have happened to Laura. Then Damon continued:

"Listen, Harris, I—how would you like to grab Mitch McGeory, turn him in, all by your lonesome?"

Harris' fingers, holding the receiver, went white. The fog whipped from his mind. "Are you cracked? McGeory's in stir. He—"

"No, no, Harris. He *was*. He broke out today. He's coming here to my place tonight! I just got tipped off."

"Why call me? I'm not a cop any more." Harris twined his fingers in the phone cord. "Why don't you buzz headquarters? What's the—"

"Look!" Damon's voice broke like a whipped schoolboy's. "I'm trying to do you a favor, Harris. I feel sorry for you and I'm trying to give you a chance to maybe get back on the force. The whole state's looking for McGeory. Handle this right and you'll be a hero. They'll have to reinstate you. All that other stuff will be forgotten."

"This doesn't make sense," Harris said bitterly. "You go for me like Hitler loves Stalin. There's a hook in it somewhere."

"I can't argue with you," Leo Damon screamed his impatience. "There isn't time. If you do this you've got to beat McGeory here, be ready for him. You damned fool, he's coming here to kill me. Either you or the cops got to be here waiting for him. I—I'm not afraid you can't handle him, but if you're not coming—" The lawyer's thin voice trailed off.

Why shouldn't Damon give me a break, Harris thought. He's a cocky little guy and he knows I'm washed up as far as Laura's concerned anyhow. He's just making a grand gesture. And he's right about this being a chance to get back in with the department. Public sentiment would switch back to my side. The newspapers would play it up big, "Ex-cop still fights crime, nabs desperate convict, single-handed!" That sort of thing.

"All right, Damon," he said. "Hold tight. I'll be right up."

"Wait, Harris! Mitch McGeory's kill-crazy. He won't be easy to take. Be sure and come well heeled."

"I—well, I don't know how I—Okay. Okay, Damon."

THE ex-cop cradled the phone, swung back into the bedroom, glanced at the bureau clock. It was

nearly midnight. The chances on being able to buy a gun or bullets at this hour were nil. He opened a drawer, picked up an old-fashioned pistol he had bought several years ago for a gag act in the annual Police Benefit and Minstrel. He had not used it since.

"It won't do me much good," he told himself. "But it's better than nothing. Least I can throw a bluff with it and at short range, it'll do damage."

He picked up the half dozen cartridges that went with the gun, inserted them. He dropped the weapon into his pocket, left the flat, went down to the street. Cabbing over to Damon's house, he stared out the window, fondling the gun in his pocket. He had thought that he would never be getting back into action like this.

The hackie gazed at him curiously in the rear view mirror, said, "Say, didn't you used to be a cop? That guy they called Hair-trigger Harris?"

"Yes," Harris said.

"That was tough," the guy said sympathetically. "A tough break."

"Yes," Harris repeated. "Yes, it was."

They had dubbed him Hair-trigger Harris when he was only a few days a rookie and walked into a bank stick-up, gun already drawn, and shot first and talked afterward. That happened several times in the next five years. Praise was heaped upon him. Very few criminals caught by Harris ever saw trial. They went straight for the morgue.

The papers doted on him, especially when his reputation spread. Wherever Officer Harris was on post, there was no petty crime. Thugs would pull a job against the chance of taking a few years in the can. But they didn't like to gamble on being killed. The newspapers hinted that maybe a few more cops could take a cue from Harris and clean the city of crime.

And so Harris rode high. The Chief warned him about being carelessly trigger-quick, but he was cocky and the people and the papers were on his side.

One night on radio car patrol with a kid rookie named Kopsic, it happened. They had a complaint of lights being seen in a deserted house. Harris entered first, searched the place from top to bottom. About to leave, he heard footsteps approaching. He stepped around a corner and full into the glare of a flash.

He pulled his gun and shot without a word, just as he had always done. That was bad. Kopsic had been worried about Harris taking so long and had entered to investigate.

Kopsic was only hit in the shoulder and pulled through, but the papers turned on Harris, along with public opinion. They said something should be done about one cop shooting another, even by accident. They played up how tough it would have been on Kopsic's wife and new-born baby if he had been killed. They said Harris was a menace with a gun.

Election time was approaching. There was a terrible stench about the whole thing. Harris had to hand in his resignation. And being a cop was his whole life.

When Laura Knight tried to straighten him out, he accused her of being unloyal. He never saw her after that. He'd been pretty nasty about it.

HIS cab braked before a small suburban home set well back behind a green blanket of lawn. Harris hiked up the flagstone path to the door, banged a fancy knocker. Leo Damon's shrill voice called:

"Door's open, Harris. Come on in."

He stepped into a dimly lit hall, headed for a light shining from the living room. It was a big room, tastefully furnished, with an oak-beamed ceiling and pine-paneled walls. Sitting at the far end, facing the door, was Leo Damon, slouched way down in a wing-backed chair.

Damon was wearing a wine-colored smoking jacket and patent leather slippers. His thinned, slightly graying hair was slicked down. A cigarette trembled from his lower lip. His

sharp-looking face was the color of weak pea soup. His long bony nose was pinched in whitely at the nostrils. His eyes were glassy with fear.

"For cripe's sake," Harris said. "Get hold of yourself, man. You look like the wrath of hell. You'll be having spasms."

The little criminal lawyer didn't move. He didn't answer. His eyes rolled. The cigarette shivered more violently in his lips. His small pale hands writhed nervously in his lap.

Harris halted, started to whirl around, but he never completed the move. The snout of a gun chilled the nape of his neck. A rumbling husky voice said, "Stand still, Harris."

Damon still stared silently. He slipped down deeper into the chair, all huddled up as though trying to lose himself in its depths.

A hand patted Harris' clothing, dipped into his pocket, and extracted his gun. A fist rammed the small of his back, shoved him violently toward Damon's chair.

"Get over there and stand beside Leo," the voice ordered.

Harris stumbled to a stop beside Damon, pivoted. The man facing him held two guns. One was a gleaming blue-steeld automatic. The other was the old pistol taken from Harris' pocket. Tall and stooped, he wore the dirty nondescript clothing of a laborer. His forehead was high and lumpy and bulging. From under frowning sparse brows, slightly slanting eyes threw off ugly lights. His nose was flat. His mouth was a pink slash.

"How you doing, Hair-trigger?" he said.

"Bad, McGeory," Harris said. "Strictly like a chump, falling for your obvious trap."

"Aw, I don't know," Mitch McGeory said. "You couldn't know that I was forcing Leo Damon to make that call."

"All right," Harris shifted his weight from one big foot to the other. "I'm here now. Get it over. What's the angle?"

"I think you know," McGeory told him. "I think you remember killing my kid brother, Harris."

"Sure," Harris said. "I caught him and a couple of pals pulling a fur loft job. I shot him."

"You murdered him!" McGeory lowered his head. His bulging forehead was shiny as shellac. "You didn't give him a whisper of a chance. He had a right to stand trial just like any other guy. But you were Hair-trigger Harris. You killed him before he could twitch an eyebrow."

Harris curled his mouth. "If I saw a mad dog on the street, McGeory, I wouldn't wait for him to bite me. I'd shoot him quick."

MCGEORY'S eyes veiled. He took another step forward, caught himself with an effort. The guns in his hands shook.

Leo Damon half rose from his chair, squealed, "You can't get away with this, Mitch. Listen, boy, I can fix things up for you if you forget this business. I've got a lot of pull. You can trust me, Mitch, I—"

McGeory twisted, pushed one of the guns toward Damon. "Shut up," he ordered. Damon fell back weakly in the chair.

McGeory went on, "I trusted you once, Damon. You had everything all set, you said. I was to get off with a ten year manslaughter rap, instead of life for second degree murder. You're a smart mouthpiece, Damon. You'd got guys out of tougher spots than I was in.

"You double-crossed me. You bolloxed up the trial on purpose. You wanted that little wren I was going with at the time. Putting me away, left you a clear field. When you ditched her for that secretary of yours, she wrote and told me all about it."

"Is that why you crushed out, McGeory?" Harris asked. "To get even with us?"

"Yeah." An arrow of tongue snaked over McGeory's dry lips.

Inside of Harris his stomach coiled like a taut spring. McGeory normally was bad business. McGeory hunted, desperate, poisoned with vengeance, was doubly deadly. He was smart, too, a hard man to outfox. The back of Harris' shirt was already glued to his spine with cold sweat, but he managed to shrug and seemed to relax.

"If you want to be a stupe, go ahead," he said, softly. "You get picked up again, now, you still just go back to a life sentence. You do any killing and it's that big chair full of hot wires. Everybody will know it's you, McGeory."

McGeory wagged the guns. "Oh, no, hot-shot. I tossed a false trail. Nobody but you two even know I'm in this part of the state."

"They will! They will!" Damon cried. "When they find us dead."

The big con shook his head. "This little automatic I got from your drawer, Leo, is going to bump Harris." He stopped and thrust out Harris' old pistol. "This is going to riddle you, Leo. When the cops find your corpses, they'll figure out that Harris, drunk, a broken down has-been came up here, crazy jealous because you took his girl, Leo. He killed you, but before you died, you managed to plug him, too."

Mitch's grin soured suddenly, leaving his face black with hate and anger. He turned Harris' pistol toward Damon. "All right, Leo," he said.

THE noise of the shots pounded through the room. Two of them, echoing. Damon jerked twice, went stiff as a herring. His eyes walled back and he slid down out of the chair on his face.

McGeory turned toward Harris. The lines on his trigger knuckle got very white. The automatic was lined right on Harris' stomach. McGeory said:

"I saw my kid brother down at the morgue that time, Harris. He had suffered like hell before he died."

"If you think I'm just going to stand here and let you do it," Harris

said tightly. He started slowly toward McGeory, an inch at a time. "This isn't any B-picture, McGeory. I'm not going to take it quiet like Damon."

"All right," McGeory said. "Come on. I'll like that. Maybe you'll feel the scorch of the powder. Come on."

But there was a funny look in McGeory's slanting eyes. There was a little doubt, a little fear. He stuck one foot behind him, just in case. Harris took another step forward.

And then an unearthly shriek, like nothing human, came from the foot of the chair where Damon had been sitting. A ragged falsetto voice screamed, "I've come back! I've come back to life, McGeory!"

McGeory spun toward the voice, saw Leo Damon awkwardly getting to his feet. Damon's sweating face was a death mask, all eyes and cheekbones and twitching hollows. His teeth were bared.

It was too much for McGeory. He shouted curses, swung the automatic around. He never used it though. Harris hit him a leaping dive, flung him to the floor so hard pictures jumped off one wall and a vase crashed from a table.

They rolled and thrashed until Harris managed to twist the gun from McGeory's hand, beat it down on that bulging pale forehead several times. Then they were both very still.

Harris got up, swaying. He turned to Damon just as the little lawyer collapsed backward into a chair muttering, "I am alive. He didn't kill me. He didn't."

Harris walked to a phone and called the police. Later, down at headquarters, he had to explain a dozen times about the pistol. It had been loaded with blanks the same as he'd used in the act at the Police Benefit show. They told him he was crazy to have gone after Mitch McGeory armed only with that. He said:

"I figured if I used it in close, blasted him in the face, it would be just as good as a bullet. You know how those things scorch at close quarters."

Home Sweet Homicide

"Dizzy Duo" Yarn



By Joe Archibald

Just before a bullet removed Leander Leffwell from the living, that Beantown screwball had completed his radio for talking with the dead. And to spot Leander's sponsor, Snooty Piper set out to tune himself in on hell's black network.

IT IS a rub-out like you read about in the whodunits or see in a neighborhood flicker house. Me and Snooty Piper attend the murder quiz, armed with credentials from the *Boston Evening Star*, and it takes place in a very modest mansion in Dorchester. The victim's name was Leander Leffwell. He had been liquidated quite thoroughly by a thirty-eight calibre pistol bullet.

"Why anybody should want t' kill him, I dunno," Iron Jaw O'Shaughnessy, from headquarters, says. "He looks like he would almost git up any minute an' apologize for the trouble he caused gettin' killed."

Iron Jaw is a detective like Rommel

is a winning general. He is a very large character who has to ride trolleys as there is no subway kiosk he can get into. Iron Jaw wears a derby hat and a pair of shoes that represent the hides that come off two cows. He holds the record in the police department for grabbing suspects—that have to be released again.

The appraiser of the defunct for Beantown studies the remains with a practiced eye and announces that Leander has been defunct for over an hour.

"Shot close up," he says. "But no powder marks on his shirt. Right through the old ticker."

"Leander Leffwell," Snooty says.

"The name sounds very familiar, Scoop."

"Nuts," I counter. "You would make a ten part Philo Wolf mystery out of a robin's egg that fell out of a tree. The motive was robbery as the whole house was ransacked!"

"Okay," Iron Jaw says nastily. "You can all go now, my boys. Binney here has everythin' figured out an'—Look you dumb cluck—I am investigatin' this murder! You keep your puss out of this case or I'll do some plaster surgery on it!"

"Don't aggravate him, Scoop," Snooty says.

Leander was no Charles Boyer anyway you looked at him. He has a noggin shaped like an owl's and a pair of eyes as big and round as those of the hoot birds.

The widow, Athenia, is very alluring if you photographed her alongside of a Ubangi and is just the type you would expect Leander to be welded to. Athenia wears no more makeup than a recluse or a duck, and has her molasses-colored hair pulled up and pugged at the back of her noggin. At the moment she is in the next room beggin' Leander to come back.

"The burglar must have been A.W.O.L. from a school for the blind," Snooty cuts in. "If he cased this joint, he should have known it was not where Henry Ford lived. What did Leander do for a livin'?"

"Up to a few months ago," a neighbor of the Leffwells tells us, "Leander was an expert on fixin' old priceless cuckoo clocks, an' I heard he could even change the voice of the wooden cuckoos in them. But when Hannibal Bisbee died, who was an eccentric, he left Leander almost five hundred thousand fish. So Leander quit working on cuckoo clocks and give all his time to his research, which was makin' a short-wave radio set."

"It has been done," I says.

"Not like this one. It is out in a shed in back of the house. It is a short-wave set to pick up voices from other planets and from the dead. Hannibal

Bisbee was steamed up over the idea and made Leander his beneficiary. He give Leander the dough with the stipulation that he use it to perfect the network for the ghosts. But why would anybody want to murder Leander?"

"It is simple," Snooty says. "Look at how many stiffs could tell who murdered them if Leander got that thing to work. That means maybe there is a thousand suspects an'—"

Iron Jaw takes his derby off and bangs it against the floor, but after awhile we calm the big flatfoot down and he starts detecting. He says it is about time the widow is under control and to bring her in.

ATHENIA enters just after the remains are removed to the morgue jalopy. She says she is ready to help in any way. She breaks open a shiny patent leather handbag to get another weep doily and says she is ready.

"Who would have a reason to knock off your husband?" Iron Jaw starts right out. He is very delicate, like an elephant's foot.

"I don't know, as he wouldn't ever hurt a flea," Athenia says. She has a very plain shiny blue serge suit on, and her shoes are flat-heeled and remind you of getting kept after school. "It was robbery, I guess. Somebody heard he was left all that money—thought he kept a lot in the house."

"There," I says to Snooty.

"Anybody else workin' on the invention?" Iron Jaw tosses out. "A rival—?"

"Oh, brother," Snooty sighs. "Not unless it is Dracula!"

"One more word out of you two creeps," Iron Jaw howls, "an' I'll knock them down your throats, see?"

"If I do say anythin'," Snooty quips, "it won't be 'arsenic', Scoop!"

"Shut up," I says.

Iron Jaw keeps grilling the widow but gets nowhere. "Pardon me very much," I cut in, "Iron Jaw, when a citizen is left moolah to the tune of

almost half an M, isn't there often some other characters who expected a cut?"

"Uh-er-why, that is a good idea, Binney," the flatfoot compliments me. "I was just goin' to ask her. How about that, Mrs. Leffwell?"

"Why, now that you mention it," the bereaved doll says, "there is a person who was mentioned in the will. Why he came trying to borrow from Leander only a few days ago. He was mad when he didn't get it. He is a cousin of Leanders, and his name is Rutherford Beamish, but he wouldn't hurt a flea."

"It was not one that was killed," Snooty says. "It was a man."

Athenia gives Snooty a look filled with iron filings and ice cubes. Iron Jaw says for me to shut Snooty Piper up or he will throw me out with him.

I pick up a footstool and say for Iron Jaw to go on questioning the female.

"Go on, Ma'am," Iron Jaw says.

"Hannibal Bisbee was very eccentric. In the will, there was fifty thousand dollars set aside for Rutherford Beamish if he abstained from drinking for three years after Hannibal's death. Leander, or his lawyer, was to give Rutherford the money at the end of that time. Rutherford wanted a thousand in advance, but Leander would not give it to him as it was against the terms of the will." Athenia finishes up, takes a deep breath, and says Rutherford most likely was innocent.

"Not unless he is proved guilty," Iron Jaw yips. "I mean—unless—where is Rutherford Beamish?"

"He lives in South Boston, not far from here. Oh, he wouldn't kill Leander."

"Not ag'in, anyways," Iron Jaw snaps. "Well, we photografted everythin' for fingerprints, so if his prints show up, we'll know he'd been here."

"Mrs. Leffwell just said he was," Snooty cuts in before I can stop him. Iron Jaw will stand no more and he makes for Snooty Piper. The widow

gets quite scared and jumps up to run out of the room and catches a cotton stocking in the shield of a detective's flashlight set. Snooty opens a door wide, then ducks to the left and Iron Jaw makes quite a clatter as he goes down the cellar steps.

"Let me help you get loose, Ma'am," Snooty says and kneels down and frees the cotton stocking which has quite a rip in it.

"Run, you fathead!" I says. "It is no time for chivalry. Iron Jaw is on his way upstairs and I bet he has got an axe. Well, I'll see you sometime soon, Snooty!"

A cop tries to stop me but I duck low and evade him and reach an open window. I am six blocks away when Snooty catches up with me. His face is a very healthy color, like the inside of a cucumber. His green topcoat is ripped down the back and he is talking to himself.

"You should be ashamed of yourself," I says. "Disturbin' the peace at an inquest. You would run amuck at a wake. Now we will read the rest of it in the papers."

"It should be interestin', if true," Snooty gulps out. "I saw somethin', Scoop—er—"

"It is too obvious," I tell the half-wit. "Why, Beamish has an alibi all right. It was robbery—not murder in the first degree."

"You may be right," Snooty says. "Let's go to the drugstore and look up the address of Rutherford Beamish, but quick! It is funny, Scoop, I have seen citizens with faces sunburned and their legs white. But—Come on, Scoop."

SNOOTY finds out where Rutherford Beamish lives and we hurry over there. It is a small house on C Street in South Boston. We sneak into an alley just as we hear the cops pull up in front. We are right under the window of the Beamish living room and can hear Iron Jaw accuse him of assassinating Leander.

"You're a liar, you big sperm

whale," Beamish says, and we raise up so we can peek in through the window. Rutherford is a little character with a bluish nose and looks like a stunted Singer's midget alongside Iron Jaw.

"Awright, boys," Iron Jaw says. "Search the joint for a gat, inside and out, while I grill him. Where was you last night between the hours of eight an' eleven?"

"In a movie, you big bum! Yeah, I was in a movie."

"What was it called?"

"*Her Double Life*," Beamish says, not too quickly.

"Tell us about it as I saw it, ha-a-ah!" Iron Jaw yelps.

"Why-er-I always fall asleep in the movies," Beamish says. "I didn't see hardly any of it. But you ain't frammin' me. Yeah, I went to see Leffwell a few days ago to get some dough belongs t' me an' he gives me the brush-off. I felt like bustin' his head in. But I didn'. Go 'way an' let me git some sleep. It's almos' two in the mornin'. Cripes, I gotta go t' work an'—"

"He is guilty," I says.

"Sh-h-h. Duck down, Scoop. The cops are searchin' outside. Beamish looks pretty dumb, huh?"

"Got it, Casey!" we hear a cop out in front yelp. "Under the porch. O'Shaughnessy!"

We raise up again and peek in through the window. The cops bring Iron Jaw a Roscoe and tell him where they found it. Rutherford turns as green as Snooty's felt hat and denied he ever saw the miniature howitzer.

"No kiddin'," Iron Jaw snarls and then scratches his neck with the muzzle of the gun.

"Hey, you dope!" Snooty yelps. "That might go off. Of all the—"

"Oh," I says, "if those cops grab us—Snooty, you—!" He does not catch up with me until I am hopping on a street car.

"Awright, I forgot myself, Scoop," Snooty says. "Let's go home."

We reach the rooming house at

three A.M. and wish it wasn't too late to go to the Greek's.

"He is guilty, Snooty," I yawn.

"He has no abili, I'll admit, Scoop. But—"

"But what? You would stand up for a sheep dog that had wool in its teeth, you moron! They found the Betsy and if the bullet that they take out of Leander fits—au revoir, Rutherford Beamish. It will serve him right!"

"I don't think he did it."

"So it was the burglar that ransacked the house!" I sniff.

"You are getting almost intelligent, Scoop," Snooty says. "Let's go to bed."

"The burglar was also Rutherford B—"

"I don't think so, Scoop."

"If I wasn't so tired, I would try an' strangle you, you—gaw-w-w-wp!"

IT IS in all the journals the next morning. It looks as if Beamish is ready for the noggin shave and the split pant-leg as the bullet that rubbed out Leander came out of the Roscoe found under the Beamish front stoop. Rutherford refuses to improve on his alibi, according to the gendarmes, and they have booked him for a date with the D.A. sometime in November.

"Citizens do go to sleep in movies," Snooty says as we enter the Greek's for a beer or two.

"But the gun, you fathead!" I says. "Could it walk to South Boston after erasing a taxpayer in Dorchester?"

"Maybe," Snooty says. "It is funny nobody heard the sound of the shot. It was when most citizens were in bed, Scoop. That neighbor of the Leffwells. I wonder—"

I have a beer. I have three beers. I tell myself I will not listen to Snooty Piper.

"Let's go down to LaGrange Street and see if Iron Jaw will give us some inside stuff," Snooty suggests.

"I'd love to," I says sourly. "Then we will go down to the zoo at feeding time and steal the horsemeat un-

der the nose of a Bengal tiger. Don't you feel well?"

I go along with Snooty Piper. We are a block away from the gendarmerie when we see Iron Jaw lurching out of a drugstore. He is a mess. One of his eyes is dimmed out and there is adhesive tape on one ear. When he spots us, he looks very puzzled about something and forgets the gripe he has against us.

"Look, Piper. I don't git it," he says. "I get home an' the wife helps me off with my coat. Then she slugs me. When I can git loose, I ast her what is the matter. She says I am a wolf as where did I git lipstick under my ear? Then she pastes me another one an' I have to lock myself in the garage.

"But the funny part of it is, I brush back of my ear with a finger an' it comes back with lipstick on it. Not much, but enough. I been tryin' to finger it out ever since. I fell asleep on the street car goin' home, but no dame would take advantage of me, huh?"

"Not unless it was a female gorilla an' even then she would think twice," Snooty says and laughs. "What you don't get into, Iron Jaw! Er, Scoop, I happened t' think we better go to the city room an' show Dogface we still are on the payroll, huh?"

"Wonderful," I agree.

"I wisht I could dope it out," Iron Jaw groans as we leave him. "Well, anyways I got a crime busted this time. What was it you said about a gorilla, hah? Look, Piper, some day I'm goin' to—"

"Let's go to the Greek's," I says.

Snooty sits in our favorite bistro, plunged into thought, but I wished it was water three hundred feet deep and he had an anvil around his neck. Ma always warned me about what company to keep.

"Scoop," the crackpot says. "Neighbors know more about you than you do yourself, don't they? They can tell you how much you owe the butcher and what you had for breakfast on any mornin'. Iron Jaw made an ar-

rest so fast, he did not bother about questioning the Leffwell neighbors as much as he should. And dames especially can tell you what her next door neighbor wore every day for thirty days."

"You think the Braves will win the World Series?" I ask.

"You will never git nowhere," Snooty sniffs. "Well, I'm going to Dorchester and see the neighbor nobody questioned yet. The one that lives in the brown-trimmed house. I saw her head out the window when we was lookin' at the corpse."

WE GO to Dorchester and knock on the door of a house marked J. C. Spink. A sloppy looking male character lets us in.

"Look," he says. "I got more insurance now than Lloyd's of London and we want no black market stuff. Oh-h-h, Min!"

Min comes out of the kitchen and takes a suspicious gander at us. She is a bony old chick and has a pair of eyes that could spot a P-38 at twenty thousand feet.

"What they want, Judson?"

"I didn't ask 'em as I ain't boss around here."

"We are from the press," Snooty says. "Lookin' for human interests on the crime case next door. Was they a happy couple?"

"I wouldn't know," Mrs. Spink says and then talks so fast a parrot would have thrown in the sponge. "I do know gettin' that money meant no difference to 'em. She wore the same dress every time she went shoppin' an' carried a handbag that was a disgrace. I bet she had it for ten years and it wa'n't no good in the firs' place. Imitation alligator I bet it was—then her shoes—like Priscilla useta wear I bet when John Alden come to court her—an' her hats! Why, I wouldn't git caught dead in—"

"Look, Min, they don't care about her hats or—"

"You shut up. Get out there and peel the pertaters. Like I said, they

lived like they didn't have a dime an' I could see into their breakfas' nook and all they et was—"

The doll keeps wagging her tongue until I think we have got into a political club by mistake. Even the dog gets up from the corner, flattens its ears, and lopes out. When she stops for a breath, Snooty cuts in fast.

"Thanks, Mrs. Spink," he says. "I am sure you have done a public service. Come on, Scoop."

"I am outside already," I yelp at him.

"She was vaccinated when quite young, I imagine," Snooty says as he joins me, "by a phonograph needle. But whether she or you know it, there is a chance she saved Rutherford Beamish from the sizzle salon in Charlestown."

"Don't be silly," I says. "She didn't say a thing worth listenin' to. Let's go to a movie."

"No, we must go shopping, Scoop."

"There are still three hundred and eleven days until Christmas," I says. "I don't git it."

"Come on. The stores will close in an hour," the jughead says very impatiently.

We go to six stores and Snooty does not find what he is looking for. In Raymond's, we purchase a very cheap looking doll's handbag for two forty-five.

"The dame you give that to," I sniff, "won't be nice to come home to. If I couldn't give nothin' good, I wouldn't—"

"Look, stupe," Snooty says. "This is a cheap bag. It is of imitation alligator, remember?"

"Oh, Mrs. Spink said Mrs.—"

"We must hurry to our rooming house, Scoop. From now on I must work very fast."

We go to the rooming house. The fathead pulls out the drawer of a dresser, fishes under some old green shirts and terrible green colored shorts, and brings out a wicked looking Betsy.

"You can get a year and a day for

havin' that in your possession," I yelp. "You get rid of it quick or you will git rid of me. You—"

"Don't be so nervous, Scoop," Snooty says and puts the Betsy in the handbag, but does not let go of it. All of a sudden he fires the cannon and I almost hit the ceiling. The landlady comes running and comes in without knocking. Snooty snaps the bag shut and holds it behind him.

"Who shot who?" the old doll howls.

"Why, it was a truck just went by—and backfired," Snooty says.

The landlady says she is a sucker to believe it and sniffs at the ozone. "That ain't face powder I smell," she snaps. "When your week is up, will you please git out of here?" She goes out and slams the door.

"Now what?" I sigh.

"I got to git some sandpaper," Snooty says, then starts ripping the bag at the seams. "Some acid should take the shine off the metal parts, Scoop."

"I hate riddles," I says. "How about some charades or gin rummy?"

Snooty goes out to the store and I knock off until he comes back. When I wake up and stretch, the fathead is sitting on the bed rubbing sandpaper against the handbag. The imitation alligator hide is getting dull and fuzzy.

"I should be able to age moonshine so fast, Scoop," Snooty says. "I would make a small fortune."

"What next?" I ask and get set.

"We will trail Leander's widow."

"Look," I says. "This left ear of mine has been givin' me trouble of late. What did you say?"

"Oh, you heard me, Scoop Binney. Tomorrow we win or lose."

"That is always a safe bet," I admit.

THAT afternoon, late, we are hiding behind a fence across the street from where Leander was erased. At about five P.M., the widow emerges and we shadow her to a street car.

"This is ghoulish," I says. "Hound-

in' a doll just back from the bone orchard."

At five-thirty, Mrs. Leffwell enters an apartment hotel in quite a ritzy section of the suburb. We go into the lobby, buy two newspapers to hide behind—and wait.

"This is silly," I sniff.

Over an hour passes and the widow does not show. About seven bells, a pair of swell-looking wrens mince across the lobby. Snooty says, "Come on, Scoop."

"But I thought we was trailin'—"

"I am goin' to make a pass at the blonde," he says. "Woof, woof!"

I chase the crackpot and reach him just as he accosts the blonde wearing leg paint. "Aren't you Mrs. Leander Leffwell?" Snooty says to the cupcake, taking her arm.

"You are nuts," I says before the blonde does.

"Get away or I'll call a cop!" the dame says.

"You won't have to shriek loud," Snooty retorts. "We are cops. Come into the lobby, sister!"

The doll does and surprises me. The brunette she is with starts running. I don't get it. Snooty peels the wrappings off the bundle he carries and produces the handbag he was working on all night. He puts his finger through a hole in one end of it. The doll stiffens like somebody has just poured starch down her throat.

"The Betsy wasn't in it, though," Snooty says to the blonde dish. "Because it was planted under an innocent character's front stoop. The one you shot your husband with—"

"That is a lie!" the widow wails. "I burned up that b— what am I saying? Why, you fresh—!"

Snooty Piper reaches out quick and scalps the widow. Her blonde wig comes off as easy as the skin off a banana. "Awright, sugar, we will go to headquarters."

She does not—for a while. She pushes Snooty Piper over a stuffed chair and he ends up by banging his noggin against the rubber plant tub

in the lobby. I make a pass at the widow and she lets go with a hatpin a foot long and I miss being gored by the width of a rose petal.

Snooty gets up, shakes his dome for a second, then joins me in the chase. We go up a back stairs and the doll throws a mop at us. It is still wet and I get it right across the pan. We corner the doll at the end of a hall where she reaches up and takes down a fire axe.

"This is a narrow hall," I gulp. "She is bound to hit one of us. Run, Snooty!"

"There is a mouse, Scoop! Look—!"

"Ee-e-e-ek!" The widow yelps and drops the fire axe. We rush her and overpower her, but when we have done so we look like two characters who have been targets for a cross-eyed knife-thrower.

"Go call the cops," Snooty says.

IT IS at headquarters. "First off," Snooty tells the doll in the presence of the D.A., "I wondered why you should have tanned stems the day of the murder investigation—you tore a sock, remember? Tsk-tsk, leadin' a double life when Leander is not even living a single one any more. But it was Iron Jaw who exposed you, or I should say, Mrs. O'Shaughnessy."

"What-a-a-a?" Iron Jaw gulps out.

"Why, yes. Her spottin' that lipstick on the neck of her spouse that come off the business end of the Betsy," I says, "when Iron Jaw scratched his neck with the hardware—"

"I'm telling this, Scoop," Snooty snaps. "Sure, as that meant the gun was fired from a handbag in which was a lipstick without a metal cap over it. There was no powder burns on Leander's bosom and the shot was muffled. Remember? I used a decoy bag, sister, to upset you. Of course the print on the gun—"

"There wasn't none. I wiped them off and—what am I sayin'? Oh, y' got me! I married that jerk, because I knew he was goin' to grab half a mil-

lion, and dressed like a drab, because that is the kind of wife he wanted. But when he got the sugar, he was going to spend it all on research for short-waves to contact ghosts.

"Well, when I left the house I lived like a human bein' an' let guys take me to the hot spots. But I couldn't stand it no more and knew I'd have half a million fish if he was to—"

"Yeah," Snooty nods. "You knew the cops would soon git around to askin' about suspects, especially characters also mixed up in the flannibal Bisbee will. Beamish had been to Leander putting on the bite and was turned down. You bopped Leander off, turned the house upside down to make it look like robbery, then ankled over to the Beamish house and planted the cannon. Hah, Beamish said he was at a movie, *Her Double Life*."

"Okay, so I knocked him off," the self-made widow squawks. "I lived a dog's life in that get-up of mine. He didn't give me enough dough to keep body and soul in one place an' I—sure, I suffered mental anguishes. I was nuts. He'd drive anybody nuts. I will get a lawyer to say I'm nuts and will beat those volts for women."

"What I wish to know," Snooty says, "how did you know Beamish would have a lousy alibi, heh?"

"Yeah," I says. "That puzzles me, too."

"I knew Rutherford Beamish went

off one day every week to get plastered—in Woburn. If he had owned up where he was at the time of the rub-out, the lawyers would wipe off the fifty grand that was coming to him, as he had to stay on the wagon three years to get it."

"What figgerin'," Snooty sighs. "No doubt, Beamish would have rather fried than lose fifty grand."

"That was a sweet job, Piper," the D.A. says.

"Oh, we are modest," Snooty grins. "But you must give Mrs. O'Shaughnessy half the credit."

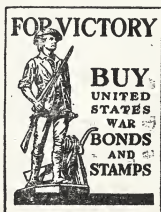
"Yeah," the D.A. said. "After this gal's lawyer tells the jury about the deceased wanting to pick up broadcasts from across the Styx and all, I won't git her more than a couple of years, I bet. Of course I will try and prosecute to within an inch of the law, boys."

"Let's see," Snooty says. "She should be out in a couple of years and I could help rehabilitate her. Once she let's her real hair grow like Veronica's, she should be a swell dish—"

"If you had lived long ago," I yelp, "you would have rice-and-ringed it with Lucretia Borgia who was a poisoner, Snooty Piper. Let's go and see if the Greek is still open."

"Of course, Scoop," the lame brain says. "So long, Iron Jaw. The case was in the bag all the time. Ha-a-a!"

"Oh, come on," I says.



FOR VICTORY

BUY
UNITED
STATES
WAR
BONDS
AND
STAMPS

Boomerang Justice

By Dorothy Dunn



FRED THOMAS wanted Frieda's murder to look like suicide. In a way, it is suicide, he told himself. Frieda has brought it on herself . . . if she were different, I wouldn't have to kill her this morning . . . if . . .

"More coffee, dear?" asked Frieda.

Her grating voice tore every word into a raw shred. Listening to her was a constant irritation to Fred—like the scrape of a nail file or the persistent bites of a fly at a picnic. Ten years of that blatant voice across the breakfast table and her father hadn't left her the money after all!

"Fred, I asked you a civil question! I've cut down on the coffee I drink so there'll be the usual amount for you and you won't even lift your hand to pass your cup!"

"Sorry, Frieda; I was just thinking of something else. I would like a little more. There's plenty for both of us."

Break your back this morning, he thought . . . be nice . . . can't afford to quarrel this time. The duplex walls were thin and the couple next door kept their ears glued to the partition, he was sure. He hoped they were listening this time. He wanted them to hear. That was part of his careful plan—his perfect blueprinted murderous idea that had practically been drawn to scale. This last breakfast was to be the first scene of the tragedy to come and he raised his voice for the invisible audience next door.

"Frieda," he began, trying to keep

his voice natural, "I've got to talk to you about Jim—he's back in town, you know."

"You aren't jealous, are you, Fred?"

"No, just worried. Prison does strange things to a man, especially a weak character like Jim. He's been drinking since he got out and has made some threats against you."

That's what Fred wanted the neighbors to hear. A man with the prison pallor still on his face had come back to his home town to threaten the woman who had refused to marry him—to get even with the banker who had discovered the shortage on the books.

"Your bank sent him to jail, Fred, and his grudge is against you. I don't think he'll harm me, but I'm glad you brought up the subject. I'd feel better if you'd take some precaution for safety. In fact—"

"I want you to take the precautions, Frieda. Will you take a little trip? Go down to your sister's until Jim gets settled down a little?"

"That's not the way to solve anything. We have to face facts. The whole town is against Jim and we may just imagine that he's out for revenge. He telephoned me yesterday morning."

There was a catlike expression in her yellow eyes that made Fred hate her more than ever. He shouldn't have married her in the first place, but she had tricked him into it. Right now, he needed money desperately. There was another shortage at the bank; this time it was on his own books. He had just taken small amounts, because

When perfect murder schemes cross, perfect justice must follow.

Frieda had let him count on getting her father's money, knowing all the while that she had been cut out of the old man's will.

"What did you say to Jim?" asked Fred, making a superhuman effort to keep his voice nice for the benefit of their neighbors. He was sure they could hear because both back doors were open and voices carried.

"Well, darling," said Frieda in a honeyed voice that she hadn't used for years, "maybe I did the wrong thing, but I asked him to come to see us this morning. I thought it would be safer for you if we find out exactly how he feels. Better to face things like adults. You will talk to him, won't you?"

For a minute Fred went white with anger. Then he smiled faintly. The murder would go off just the same! Let Jim come. Frieda had played right into his hand. Jim was supposed to be the fall guy if anything went wrong with the verdict of accidental death or suicide. All the better if he wanted to be right on the scene of the crime!

"I'll try to reason with him, Frieda, but I don't think it will do much good. Think I ought to try to get him back at the bank?"

"That's going too far, Fred. Just so he leaves us alone."

Fred looked at his watch.

"If he doesn't come soon, I'll have to leave."

"I know, and it's my day to wash."

Fred grinned. He had counted on Frieda's stubborn way of sticking to routine. She'd wash today if the house was on fire, because it was Monday and she always washed on Monday.

THE patent doorbell rang. The mellow sound of the chimes brought Frieda to her feet quickly.

"There he is, Fred! I'm frightened now. Maybe I shouldn't have asked him to come."

Fred drained his coffee and folded up his newspaper, waiting for Frieda to go to the door.

But she sat down opposite him and narrowed her yellow eyes. Her face

began to swim and he felt very weak.

"It doesn't work very fast, Fred," she said in a sibilant whisper that the neighbors couldn't hear, "but it's a strong poison that does a good job!"

Fred gripped the edge of the table, his lips swelling and his eyes hurting.

"Why you—"

"Save it, Fred," she went on in a voice that was just a low hiss. "This is our last breakfast together. You won't live to make me the laughing stock of the town. When I told you I didn't get Dad's money, you began chasing Valma Banks. Well, that's one rich widow you'll never catch! Very soon, I'll be another rich widow for this town."

"You got money from your father and held out on me?" asked Fred.

"I got a settlement through a Cleveland bank before his death. He knew what you were. It won't be long, Fred. I'm going to let Jim into the living room and ask him to wait there for you. Then I'm going down to the basement and start my washing. By the time Jim wanders in here to find you, I'll have an alibi and Jim will be up here with your body. The neighbors will testify. They can't hear this whisper, but they heard the rest."

"Suppose that isn't Jim at the door?"

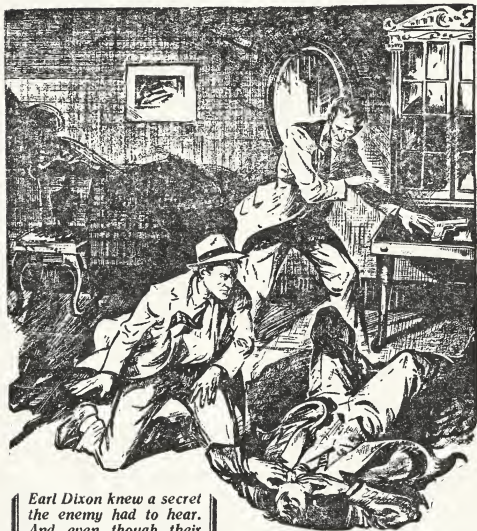
Fred was getting more rigid and he was too cloudy in his mind to hear Frieda's voice any more. He was vaguely conscious of the fact that she went to the front of the house and came back in a panic. She took away the coffee cup. He couldn't see any more, but he could imagine her actions. Something had gone wrong, must not have been Jim at the door.

Finally Fred heard her open the door of the basement and he laughed.

The blueprint murder would go off as planned. Frieda would start the washing machine and all Fred's work on the wiring would not be wasted. He died with an omnipotent look on his face, knowing that his wife would be electrocuted without standing trial.

Doom Casts Three Shadows

By Vaseleos Garson



Earl Dixon knew a secret the enemy had to hear. And even though their slaying shadows walked, worked, and lived with him, Dixon thought he had found a way to shut their ears forever.

RUN, the sharp voice in his mind stabbed. Run! Itchy, tiny beads of sweat were sticking out on Earl Dixon's forehead. The skin was strung tight against his high

cheekbones. The little muscles in the sides of his strong jaw twisting, writhing. His heart was a hurting thunder in his chest.

Run, the voice stabbed again.

It was exquisite agony to move his legs in the leisurely gait he had assumed when he dropped off the Sixth Street bus.

He didn't look back.

But he knew the shadow was still there, a shadow that held death in its fingers, almost hoping he would break and run.

The cold sweat was dripping from under his armpits when he covered the three blocks from the bus stop to the apartment building where he lived.

Earl Dixon drove his lean body up the outside stairs at that same slow pace. At the top, he turned, and his gray eyes looked down the way he'd come in a brief hurried glance.

Still following, he thought, as he pushed open the door. The closing of the door was like the shutting out of a bad dream.

He stood at the bottom of the stairs, there in the vestibule, and he breathed in long deep breaths trying to drive the trembling from his limbs.

How could it happen, this monstrous thing? A pool game, a drink, and happiness freezing against the bitter cold of all this. . .

Earl Dixon straightened his shoulders and went slowly up the three flights of stairs until he reached the floor where his apartment was.

At the top, he halted, staring down the stairwell, and listened. He heard the soft sighing sound the pneumatic door made as it shut.

The shadow was still following, then.

He walked across the hall, inserted his key in the door of Apartment 11. His shaking fingers dropped the key; it fell with a clear ringing note on the wooden floor.

He stooped, was picking it up, when the door eased open.

THE dying sunlight, seeping in through the windows, made a silhouette of the bulky body of the man called Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown's eyes were the only things he could see in the shadow, those eyes were tiny tongues of flame.

Earl Dixon stepped into his apartment. The shadow came in behind him and closed the door softly.

Mr. Brown stood in front of Dixon, still a shadow with eyes of fire. Then Earl Dixon's eyes adjusted themselves to the inside light and he saw that Mr. Brown was smiling.

The smile didn't soften Mr. Brown's hard heavy face with the bushy hair and the bushy eyebrows. Still all dressed in brown, Dixon thought as he waited, the dryness like a tangible thing in his throat.

"Well?" asked Mr. Brown, almost affably. The shadow behind Dixon stirred a little on restless feet.

"I haven't got it," Dixon said. The words were bits of sandpaper scraping across his dry throat.

"Today was the deadline, Dixon," Mr. Brown said brittlely. "You promised it by five o'clock. It is now fifteen minutes past five and you have failed. You know what that means?"

"Please," said Dixon. "I couldn't get it today; I tried, but they were too watchful. I couldn't move from my board. I told you I'd get it.

"You should know I will. You've taken my life from me by taking Carol and Joe."

"So?" asked Mr. Brown.

"Give me another day. I'll do it."

"Hertzman," Mr. Brown said suddenly. "Dixon is cooperating, isn't he?"

"Ja," said the shadow softly from behind Dixon. "He has seen nobody he should not. I say it."

"Very well, Dixon," Mr. Brown said. "Until tomorrow, *auf sehen*."

The door opened and three shadows drifted out into the hall. The door closed quietly. Earl Dixon was alone in the apartment.

"Blast them," he said. "Blast them

to hell." His burning, weariness-shot eyes were staring at the closed door.

Then he looked toward the piano, where a finger of the dying sun touched a picture. He walked over to the piano slowly, the muscles in his legs still quivering.

He held up the picture—and the stare went out of his eyes.

"Carol," he said softly to the two faces that smiled up at him.

"I can't do it, not even for you and Joe. I'm caught, Carol, and whichever way I turn, I'm wrong. I've tried, but I can't shake Hertzman." A lump in his throat made him mute.

He saw them as it used to be. He'd come home, and Joe, four years of sturdy and vibrant life, would hurl himself toward the door. *And I'd catch him, Earl Dixon thought, and swing him around and tuck him under my arm and lug him in the kitchen.* And Carol, the red-gold of her hair shimmering as she turned her head, would smile and say, "Hi, guy . . ."

Earl Dixon stood for a long moment in the apartment, as the tendrils of the sun withdrew and left grayness in their stead.

"I'll come for you," he said softly. "I'll come for you," he repeated. It was an oath.

The tension was back in his legs when Earl Dixon came down the outside stairs of the apartment. And his eyes were stabbing the darkness, only partially adulterated by the street lights. It was there. The darker shadow in the darkness of a stairwell.

He walked slowly, unaware of the people about him, hurrying by him. The darker shadow detached itself from the stairway and the poor light shone on its face.

It was Hertzman.

Slowly, his mind said, don't hurry. Hertzman might get suspicious.

IT WAS a two block walk down to the Strand Theater. The shadow was still following. Earl Dixon paid no attention to the advertisements, casually strolled to the ticket window,

bought a ticket, and went into the theater.

He glanced back through the glass door after it closed, and saw Hertzman delving into a hip pocket.

An usher said, "Aisle five," and Dixon nodded. He started that way, but abruptly wheeled and went into the men's room.

He pushed through into the little anteroom leading into the washroom. It was empty.

He settled back against the wall in the anteroom and waited quietly.

He didn't wait long.

Hertzman pushed open the door, and in the first split second Dixon recognized the shadow's profile and his fist smashed home against the thin jaw.

Dixon pulled Hertzman's body in through the door, let the portal swing shut. He laid Hertzman's lax body against the wall, darted out into the lobby.

He went up to the second floor where the corridor was railed off, overlooking the lobby.

Again he waited quietly, but not long.

Hertzman was staggering a little as he came into the lobby below, his head swinging his eyes around in searching glances. He kept turning his green felt hat over and over in his hands.

As Hertzman pushed out the exit door, Dixon moved quickly down to the lobby. His mind was exulting; it was working, this simple little plan of his. Lose Hertzman, then follow him to wherever he might go! There was Dixon's answer.

Dixon slid out of a side exit into the alley, hurried down the paved lane to the street.

Hertzman was at the corner, waiting for the light. Dixon watched him move slowly across the street, his ferret face still swinging, looking, the green hat bobbing.

Then Hertzman went into the drugstore. While he was inside, Dixon slipped across the street. After maybe five minutes, Hertzman came out

again. Dixon dodged back into the darkness of a basement stairway, his eyes just over the edge of the top step.

Hertzman moved by, walking fast. Dixon counted to twenty slowly, then slipped from his hiding place and onto the sidewalk. Hertzman's green hat bobbed along a block ahead.

Dixon felt almost light-hearted, knowing there was no shadow behind him, and that Hertzman must surely lead him to where the man called Mr. Brown was keeping Carol and Joe.

Hertzman was still moving fast, bumping against the crowd, his light green topcoat flapping behind him. He wasn't looking back, so Dixon took a chance and closed the gap between them by half a block.

Then the crowd was thinning, but Hertzman was hurrying on and Dixon was dropping back.

How far was Hertzman going to walk? Dixon wondered. They moved, Hertzman and his brown-suited shadow, out of the business district where brightly lighted windows sat row on row into a residence district, ever following Strand Avenue.

The street was darkening. The April wind was creeping through Dixon's clothing. But it wasn't as cold as Dixon's heart that was frozen with fear for his wife and boy, locked up somewhere at the mercy of the man called Mr. Brown.

If this failed—he cast the thought aside. He couldn't fail. He must not. For by breaking free from Hertzman's ferret trailing, he had virtually signed the death warrants for Carol and Joe.

Dixon dived for the shelter of a hedge as he saw Hertzman hesitate up ahead.

He waited the space of a dozen pounding pulse beats until Hertzman finished surveying the street behind him and turned into the huge brown-stone house on the corner of Strand and Twentieth streets.

He moved forward slowly, his body bent double, trying to lose himself in the shadow of the hedge.

Hertzman was a dark figure moving up the wooden steps of the rambling house. The light breeze brought a creak of a loose step to Dixon's ear. Hertzman's feet made a mild thunder on the porch and halted.

Dixon stopped too.

A WIDE shaft of light spilled over the lawn, made Dixon duck automatically. Then the door closed and it was dark again save for the swinging street light on the corner.

Dixon moved forward one step.

And stopped.

His whole body sagged. The exaltation in his mind dropped like a banner on a windless day.

He turned around slowly. The man's teeth were a bright blur in the light reflected from the street lamp.

"Going somewhere, Herr Dixon?" the voice had said. The bore of the gun was a cold circle against his ribs.

"I guess not," Dixon said. His voice was flat and weary. He saw again the apartment and the three shadows that had gone into the hall. Three. The man called Mr. Brown and Hertzman and another. Fool. Not two, three.

"Quick," this new shadow said, pushing the gun hard against his spine.

The sound of his feet on the porch was like the crack of doom in Earl Dixon's ears. The shadow's hand reached by him. His hand, pasty white in the darkness of the porch, shoved open the door.

"Herr Dixon," the shadow behind him announced. The man called Mr. Brown was not smiling now. Nor was Hertzman, the thin lips drawn back from his sharp teeth in a scowl.

The man called Mr. Brown strode forward, his heavy body moving lightly. His thick broad hand reached out. The blow made Dixon's brain dance dizzily. Something warm seeped onto his tongue from the side of his mouth where the flesh had been ruptured against his teeth.

"So?" said Mr. Brown quietly. "You would not keep your bargain?"

His open hand flashed out again. Even though Dixon expected it, the smacking blow staggered him.

Mr. Brown shrugged. "You have broken your promise—we shall break ours." He smiled then and the tiny tongues of flame in his eyes flared brightly.

"Hertzman," he said softly.

"Ja?" the ferret snarled.

"See that Mrs. Dixon and the boy have a comfortable bed for tonight." The ferret looked displeased and Mr. Brown chuckled. Dixon watched the by-play, his gray eyes quiet despite the ache in his heart.

"Ja," said Mr. Brown, "Make them very comfortable. Remove the mattress and blankets from the bed and bind them to the springs." The displeasure on Hertzman's ferret face vanished and his beady eyes sparkled. Dixon bit his lip but did not feel the pain.

"Have they been fed?" Mr. Brown said, placing his arm on Hertzman's shoulder. From the other room came a woman's throaty voice, "*Nein*, I am but now making ready a lunch."

"Forget it," Mr. Brown ordered. "They will have nothing to eat or drink."

"You devil," Dixon said hoarsely and strode forward, but the gun jabbed harshly into his back.

Mr. Brown smiled. He did not look at Dixon as he said, "Now we shall see how quickly Mr. Dixon brings us what we want." He turned away toward a door at the far end of the living room. Almost as an afterthought he threw a sentence over his shoulder:

"Take Mr. Dixon home, Karl, and see that he has a good night's sleep. For he has much work to do tomorrow."

Then he strode through the door and it shut quietly behind him. Hertzman still stood there, his beady eyes bright on Dixon's face. He said in his toneless voice, "Your *frau* is lovely, *mein Herr*. Her soft skin will bruise easily." He turned and followed Mr. Brown.

"Come," Karl said, jabbing the gun in his back.

Earl Dixon's mind was a chamber of horrors as he moved wearily along beside Karl. Fool, his mind would say, you have only made it worse. There will be no rest for Carol and Joe tonight; their soft bodies will be aching from those cold hard springs. Their stomachs will be empty; their lips parched with thirst, because you thought you were smart.

They are suffering because you had to brag about the wonderful work you were doing for the war effort, and someone who waited, ears flapping for just such words, had heard, and then they took Carol and Joe away from you.

No one can help you, Earl Dixon, but yourself. You are too closely watched—even at work they know what you're doing because one of them is working near you. Remember the note you left in the drawer by your board? The note that told the whole story? And then when you came to work the next day, almost sure that the night man who used your board would get the note and the F.B.I. would close in and Carol and Joe would be safe again, remember what you found?

"We have the note, Mr. Dixon. Do not try such a thing again."

Karl's voice broke into his thoughts, "We are here."

WITH Karl beside him, Earl Dixon drove his lean body up the outside stairs, through the vestibule, up the stairs. At the second floor landing, Mrs. O'Hara opened the door from its narrow crack and said:

"Where's Carol and Joe, Earl? I haven't seen them for almost three days."

He started to answer, but Karl nudged him and said, "Both our families took a week's vacation, so Earl and I are batching it."

Mrs. O'Hara stared from Dixon to his companion. Dixon's heart beat faster. He wanted to shake his head

desperately, but he was much too aware of the bulge in the coat pocket where Karl held his right hand. Karl said, after what seemed an eternity:

"Earl's a good cook; I'm not. So I'm moving in with him until the wife gets back."

Mrs. O'Hara stopped staring and laughed, "You don't know him like I do. He tried to bake a cake for Carol's birthday and it almost fell through the basement," she said. She laughed again. Then to Dixon, "I'm glad you could give Carol a vacation; it was pretty lonely for her while you were working twelve hours a day on your job." She started to close the door, then asked abruptly:

"Where did she go?" And Dixon seizing this last straw said, "To her mother's." Then he started walking toward the third flight of stairs.

"To her mother's?" Mrs. O'Hara asked and there was puzzlement in her voice. Dixon hurried up the steps, Karl right behind him. Then the door to Mrs. O'Hara's apartment closed with a bang.

Karl was cursing softly as Dixon opened the door, switched on the lights. He pulled the Luger from his pocket and with a sudden sweeping motion he dragged the barrel and sights across Dixon's forehead. The shocking pain sent broken lightning through Dixon's head and he staggered. Karl struck again.

"You fool," he snarled. "We know your wife's mother is dead." He struck again and a blackout squeezed hold of his brain.

When he opened his eyes he was lying on his bed still dressed and his head was a throbbing boil of pain. Dawn light was creeping into the windows and somewhere someone was snoring softly. He moved his pounding head and saw Karl sprawled in one of the living room chairs which he had pushed against the door of the bedroom.

The squeaking of the bed aroused his guard. Karl said softly, "Good morning. I trust you had a pleasant

sleep. I couldn't bear to awaken you. You looked so weary."

Karl got up from the chair, moved it from the door. Dixon staggered to his feet, went into the bathroom and doused his burning face in cold water. He looked at his haggard bearded face in the mirror, gingerly touched the three livid welts that Karl's gun had made on his forehead. He made a cold compress out of the washcloth to take the swelling down.

The cold damp washcloth relieved some of the ache and throbbing in his head, but his mind was frantic with the thought of Carol and Joe—and in his heart he was hoping against hope that Mrs. O'Hara had decided to investigate why he'd told her that his wife was going to visit her dead mother.

Abruptly he became aware of something frying. He smelled bacon and eggs. He walked swiftly to the kitchen. Karl was there frying eggs and bacon. He looked up and smiled almost like a boy. "Nazis can do anything," he opined.

Dixon sat across the table from Karl, but did not touch the food his guard placed in front of him. He sat smoking steadily, lighting one cigarette from the butt of another.

When Karl finally leaned back, patted his stomach, and said, "It's almost time for work, isn't it?" Dixon got up, put on his coat, and moved toward the door, Karl following closely.

As they moved downstairs, Dixon glanced at the door to Mrs. O'Hara's apartment, then glanced quickly at Karl. Karl seemed happy for he was whistling softly under his breath.

Thoughts pounded and smashed at his brain during the ten block walk to the plant. As they reached the walk along the high steel fence, a glimmer of an idea was growing in his brain. He savored it and let it bloom. He was almost smiling when he reached the gate. The smile turned to a thin-lipped snarl when Karl said:

"If you are thinking of that Mrs. O'Hara, Mr. Dixon, I can relieve your

mind. She has been eliminated." Karl laughed and walked away. The shock of it almost staggered Dixon.

The gate guard looked at him sharply as he flipped out his identification card. "Sick, Dixon?" he asked. Dixon shook his head, "I fell and bumped my head last night."

HE SAT at his drawing board, only half seeing it, checking the sketch of the new gas container. So Mr. Brown wanted the gas formula, did he? He'll get better than that, Dixon decided grimly, he'd get the gas itself. And Dixon almost chuckled, but the thought of Carol and Joe sobered him—and the sharp stab of the memory of Mrs. O'Hara—*She has been eliminated*—sharply forged his plan.

Rapidly, he smoothed out the sketch, drafted it into a sharp drawing that the men in the glass-blowing room could easily follow. Then he hurried to Hastings, testing room foreman, and said:

"I think I've got the shockproof container; could I have a model made and checked under actual conditions?" Hastings nodded, flipped out a pass book, scribbled on it.

When Dixon came out of the plant at five o'clock, he looked for Karl, but saw the ferret-faced Hertzman instead. Hertzman followed him like a drifting shadow as he walked, sharply aware of the coldness against his left leg.

He did not dare walk swiftly, but held himself stiffly, his hat, contrary to his usual custom, sitting squarely upon his head. He was hoping and praying his strategy would work. It was taking a piece from Mr. Brown's own masterminding, a streamlined version of an ace in the hole.

He desperately hoped that Hertzman's ferret eyes would assimilate the fact that he had departed from the usual in the way he wore his hat. That was the first step. He grinned suddenly. Hertzman would be blind as a bat if he failed to notice that he walked as if treading on eggshells.

Dixon had a bad moment when he started up the outside stairs of the apartment. A gust of wind threatened to blow off his hat. Quite ostentatiously, he placed both hands to his hat and held it.

He waited in the vestibule. In a few seconds, the door opened again and Hertzman came in, stared at him harshly.

"Up," Hertzman growled. They started up the stairs, Hertzman breathing harshly, Dixon walking stiffly like a frozen jointed doll.

It was almost the same scene as last night, Dixon thought, as the key slipped from his fingers and fell with a clear ringing note on the wooden floor. He didn't dare stoop to pick it up. Hertzman grunted, retrieved it suddenly and stuck it in the lock.

Karl and the man called Mr. Brown were standing in the shadowy room.

"Well?" Mr. Brown said unctuously. Gingerly, Dixon slipped a hand into his pocket and brought out a slip of paper. Mr. Brown seized the paper avidly, turned on a floor lamp, read it almost instantly. His hard heavy face flushed red as he stared at the paper; then at Dixon standing there licking his dry lips.

"So?" he snarled. "You give me the gas formula, *ja*? The formula for sugar, you pig." He snarled then, throatily, and strode angrily forward, his fat heavy fist shaking. Dixon consciously steeled his muscles and the effort should have been very obvious. He cast a prayer to the winds that Hertzman would catch the cue. Dixon saw Mr. Brown's heavy arm lifting like a slow motion scene.

Then Hertzman gasped, "*Nein!*" and lunged forward. He caught Mr. Brown's heavy arm, hurled it to one side so that it did not touch Dixon. He was screaming something in German, over and over again, something that sounded like "*Hetta, hetta!*"

MR. BROWN composed himself then. The smile that grew on his face was almost angelic. "Thank

you, Fritz. Please remove his hat."

Hertzman lifted the hat gently from Dixon's head. Dixon breathed a silent prayer of thanks. Hertzman turned it over gently. Mr. Brown looked at the inside of the hat; then he reached his pudgy fingers inside and lifted out a vial half as big as a test tube, sealed completely.

The glass of the tube was fragile, looked almost thin as cellophane. Mr. Brown held it cupped in his hands.

"So, *Herr* Dixon," he said. "You wanted me to slap you so that I would jar off your hat. The vial would break and, pouf! we would be unconscious, *hein?*"

Dixon nodded wearily, but hope was making his heart pound.

Mr. Brown said softly as if reciting something he had learned by rote, "This new gas is odorless, colorless. Breathed into the lungs it is almost instantaneous in action, but even gas masks are useless if the gas is present in much quantity for it is absorbed by the pores causing paralysis." He stopped talking for a moment, took Dixon's chin in his hand and tilted it up. "So you were prepared, *Herr* Dixon? Nose filters so that the gas would not affect you while you waited for us to fall.

"You could move and get out before the gas seeped into your body. But now, Dixon, we have a sample of the gas. Our chemists can analyze it. One more secret weapon of America is on the trash heap." Mr. Brown chuckled.

"You accidentally fulfilled your part of the bargain, *Herr* Dixon," Mr. Brown continued, the bright flames in his eyes sparking. "But you tried to destroy us. The penalty for that is death," he intoned. "You, your wife

and child will die." And he smiled.

This is it, Earl Dixon thought. He said the words like frightened mice, "You can't, Mr. Brown, you have the gas; please let Carol and Joe go."

Mr. Brown laughed and his big head nodded to Hertzman who swung up the gun, lashed it sharply at Dixon's head. Dixon's head rolled with the blow, but he staggered, his legs crossing. The sound of his feet thudding on the floor muffled the other noise. He fell to the floor, holding his breath.

"What is—" Mr. Brown said suddenly. There was a quick scuffle of shoes, softened by the rug. There were three dull thuds, almost together. Dixon, his head still ringing from the blow, staggered to the door, flung it open, got out into the hall, closed the door behind him.

He sat down in the hallway, slightly nauseated from the effects of the gas, and began picking the thin shards of glass from his calf where the second vial of gas had been strapped by his garter.

It was sort of sleight of hand, he figured. Get your audience to concentrate on your left hand while you pulled a rabbit out of the hat with your right—only in his case it was, look at my hat, concentrate on it while I smash the vial strapped to my leg.

He walked slowly down to the pay phone in the foyer, and his heart was light as he dialed for the operator.

Carol and Joe would be home soon; and those three Nazis would pay the penalty for Mrs. O'Hara's death. He began to whistle the Star Spangled Banner softly, but broke off when the operator's voice echoed in his ear.

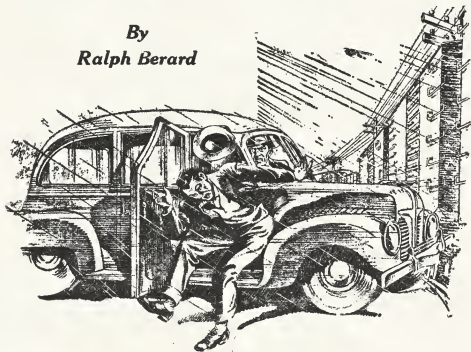
"Give me the F.B.I.," he said, and his heart was singing.



It began to seem as if that murderer was the only sane man in a town full of lunatics. For he was the only one who could not see . . .

The Ghost of His Guilt

By
Ralph Berard



The tendency toward crime grows like a plant. A simple suggestion dropped into the mind as a seed is dropped into the earth may blossom into murder. If the soil be fertile the mind may nourish the thought of crime until the physical self becomes the slave of greed, avarice, or vengeance. The person affected is no longer able to restrain himself. The act of murder becomes unavoidable.

JULE FREDERICK tossed down his uncle's book. All of Frank's psychology and philosophy was bosh. Jule could not see that his own decision to kill the uncle whose hospitality he now enjoyed had grown upon him exactly as the paragraph he had just read, described.

Steps sounded on the front sidewalk. It was Frank, walking home

from work in the shipyards to save gasoline. The fool!

Frank Punroe was fifty, a slender man who looked less. He had published a successful book called *Tendencies to Crime*. Royalties had brought him a small fortune. Jule would inherit that money and this house if Uncle Frank were to suddenly die in an accident. That was the seed which had blossomed into this night's plot for murder within Jule's mind.

Frank came in the front door and walked through the hall. Jule heard him giving instructions to Markham regarding dinner.

Iner Markham had worked for Frank ten years, since before the death of Frank's wife, Irene. Markham, a quiet, unassuming man of me-

dium height, had calm brown eyes and dignified even features. According to Frank, Markham was a man of high intellect. He had even made helpful suggestions for Frank's book and Frank treated him like one of the family. They spent hours discussing philosophical and psychological problems. Jule considered Markham a sissy and a fool.

Frank returned from the kitchen. His eyes probed Jule's indolent face in an uncomprehending way. "Didn't you work this afternoon?"

Jule's little finger tickled the ash from his cigarette. "I get awful tired working in a shipyard as a patriotic duty." Rising and stretching, he added:

"I feel rested now, though; I'll drive you to lodge after dinner."

Jule usually drove his uncle's car on Thursday evenings. He let Frank out at the lodge hall, then went on downtown to play pinball games or gamble in Jake Jellico's pool hall. Near midnight he would pick his uncle up and bring him home.

Frank seemed to realize any criticism of his nephew's attitude would be words wasted. He only frowned his disapproval and went on upstairs, remarking, "We'll go at the usual time."

Jule lit a cigarette and smiled. He laid his plans carefully. While they ate dinner, wind began to moan about the corners of the house. Raindrops splashed against the windows. Frank would have already been dead had it rained any of the last three Thursday nights.

They left the house in a downpour. Jule started the motor with the disconcerting knowledge that his heart was beating faster than usual. Frank stepped into the car and settled beside him. The driveway was a flowing stream.

"Nice night for a murder," his uncle remarked.

The big car coughed. Jule dragged the choke. Why did his uncle have to make a crack about murder? Why did he and Markham always talk about

crime? They wouldn't be doing it much longer now.

Jule drove carefully. In a few minutes they would come to the railroad yards. The Washington Western would be making up its fast transcontinental freight. At this hour Front Street would be blocked by the cars. Jule had checked it all very carefully. Front Street was unlighted.

If an automobile hit a freight car at forty miles, the chance of an occupant in the front seat being killed was almost one hundred per cent. At fifty miles, death was practically certain. Jule had simply arranged a way of jamming the throttle. He would turn into Front Street unexpectedly, gun the motor, make an exclamation about the throttle being stuck, then open his door and jump.

Jule's heartbeat became a hurried hammering. *The action of the mind definitely influences heart action.* His uncle had often said that in his discussion of psychology. But Jule refused to believe it even now that his own heart was thumping like a drum.

They rounded the corner. The train was there. *There are such things as ghosts.* Frank had said that one evening at the table. *They often come back to haunt criminals. Sometimes they are not overly active. They are then spoken of as Conscience. In certain cases they become terrible hallucinations. They only exist in the criminal's mind, but they can become so entirely real that they result in causing outright madness.*

THE car rushed forward. Speeding the engine had stopped the windshield wiper. It was something Jule had not considered. It made it unlikely that Frank would see the cars through the rain-spattered windshield. It also made it hard for Jule to judge the exact instant to open his door and leap out.

"Why are you driving so fast?" Frank asked.

Jule did not look at Frank. He didn't answer. He had to jump at once. Half

a minute from now would be too late. He pressed his foot down hard. The throttle stuck in the mechanical contraption he had arranged. With his left hand, he unlatched the door and pushed.

The gusty wind struck the car's side. The door was held shut. He heard himself shouting, "Jump, Uncle, jump!" That warning was part of his plan. If somehow Frank should live, this would be simply an accident. No one could ever prove this was murder.

Now there was terror in Jule's words. "Jump! Jump!" Of course, being unprepared, Frank would have no time to jump. His door was locked by a trick catch. But could Jule himself get free? The wind was holding his own door like a giant hand.

He lifted his foot. The throttle was stuck. He couldn't get out! The dark red hulk of the box-car was before him, a dull blur. He twisted the door handle. The door gave. He pushed hard, then straightened his body as the shelter of the car stopped the wind and he leaped free.

His body was hurled forward. He came to a halt on his face, shaken, bleeding, almost unconscious. He was close enough to reach up and touch the red box-car. The wrecked automobile was right beside him. Pain soaked through his body, but after a little he was able to stand up and see the horrible thing he had done.

Frank Punroe's car was only half its former size. The back wheels were only three feet from the front ones. Jule walked toward it, laughing aloud in the storm. He was in a delirium of relief and joy. He had succeeded. Nothing could be alive in the tangle of glass and steel before him.

A trainman came with a lantern. A siren blared. An ambulance—no, a hearse was coming for Frank's body. But where was the body? Where was Uncle Frank? It was not a hearse; it was a police car.

A policeman leaped out holding a roughly dressed man by the neck of his coat. "What's going on here?" the

officer demanded of no one in particular. "We stopped this fellow running away down at the end of the block."

More people came. The train brakeman, the engineer, and the crew from an engine nearby. The rain beat upon them. Finally Jule was able to tell someone:

"I guess I'm all right, but my uncle was in the car too."

Everything was confused. A policeman started looking into the wreckage. Jule stepped closer. He looked where Frank had been sitting. The windshield was broken out. The front seat was flush against the dash. But Frank's body wasn't there. Jule looked into the empty freight car where some of the pieces of windshield had been thrown. Frank wasn't there.

The policeman began questioning the rough man they had caught. "I didn't have nothin' to do with it, I tell ya. I was hookin' a ride and was half asleep. They was four of us in there. This big thing come down the street and ploughed into the car. We all breezed out o' there."

"You say your uncle was in the car?" a heavy-set railroad man asked Jule.

Jule had himself under control. "He *was* in there," he confirmed. "Maybe he jumped. That's what I did."

"He wouldn't have any reason to run away, would he? He wouldn't leave."

Jule shook his head. "No, he wouldn't have any reason to leave."

Cold, calculating, murderous reason came back to Jule's brain. Frank had to be dead. His uncle had still been sitting there when he had jumped. Frank couldn't possibly have lived.

But, dead or alive. Frank Punroe was not found. A sudden fear came to Jule. A ghost! What had Frank often said about the mind? The mind could control the body in many ways. Surely, after a man was dead, his mind couldn't cause his body to vanish.

Jule sank to the ground. One of the policemen stepped over to him. He wasn't unconscious. They helped him

up on rubbery legs and got him into the prowler car. They kept him overnight at the city hospital. The next morning he went home to his uncle's house.

The crime committed, the excitement over, the criminal invariably finds himself in a position he neither envisaged or planned to meet. Something, someplace, in spite of his most careful planning, has gone amiss.

The laws of chance and circumstance have asserted themselves. The criminal is filled with panic but controls it. A confidence born of desperation asserts itself. In concealing the crime, a strain is placed upon the criminal's mentality which distorts and confuses his reason, in many cases, culminating in outright madness.

JULE dared enter his uncle's home only after careful consideration of what his attitude would be. Markham met him in the hallway and looked at him in a way Jule could by no means understand.

"You're not working today either?" Markham asked this as though the fact astonished him.

Jule made no effort to conceal his nervousness: "Uncle and I were in a serious accident last night. I just came from the hospital. I don't know what happened to Frank. He must have been killed."

Markham's features became even more enigmatic. "That is ridiculous. Your uncle slept in his bed as usual last night. He went to work this morning." Markham strode toward the stairway.

Jule's throat grew tight. His knees weakened. Then his uncle was alive! But why had he not made some inquiry as to what had happened to Jule? Jule grabbed Markham's shoulder:

"Didn't my uncle mention the accident; didn't he say—"

Markham cut Jule off. "He said his lodge meeting was most interesting. He came home on the bus when you failed to stop for him." The servant was looking at Jule very strangely. "I think there is something the matter with you, Jule. Maybe you should see

a doctor." Markham went on up the stairs.

Jule stared after him a moment, then went into the living room, sat down on the davenport, and lighted a cigarette. His uncle couldn't be alive. As Jule's mind reviewed the previous evening's events, he became more and more convinced that Frank could not have lived through them. Yet Markham said his uncle had eaten breakfast and gone off to work.

Well, Jule could easily check all this with no danger to himself. Or—could he?

Jule leaped up, ground the ashes from his cigarette, and went to the telephone. He dialed a number with feverish haste. Jess Richards, the presiding officer of Frank's lodge, operated a garage on Madison Street. Shortly, Jule had Richards on the telephone.

"No," Richards informed Jule, "Frank didn't come last night. I read in the paper about his accident. It said Frank vanished in thin air. That isn't possible of course. I wish you'd—"

Jule promised to let Richards know as soon as any word came of Frank. He hung up realizing that even such a call as he had just made increased his own difficulties. But there was one more call that was imperative. He dialed the shipyard where he and Frank both worked.

Frank was not there.

Wobbly legs carried Jule back to the davenport. He sat down heavily, staring at the vacant room. Markham came downstairs. He had put on street clothes. He looked at Jule in that same strange way.

"I'm going out," he said. "When Frank comes, tell him I shall be back in time to prepare dinner."

Jule stood open-mouthed. The front door closed behind Markham with a little slam. Through the French windows he watched Markham move down the front walk. Was Markham crazy? Had he actually believed Frank was in the house the night before?

The telephone rang.

Julie straightened, ground out his new cigarette. He became conscious of moisture on his forehead and of being afraid to answer the telephone. He forced himself to lift the instrument. "This is Frank Punroe's residence."

"Police headquarters would like to talk to Julie Frederick."

The sweat on Julie's forehead felt clammy. "This is Julie Frederick."

"Your uncle telephoned early this morning and asked us to call you. He was afraid you might worry."

Julie swallowed, his throat feeling tight and dry. "Where is Uncle Frank?"

"He said he was working at the shipyard. I guess he got stunned a little last night and wandered off."

Julie thanked them and let the instrument slide from his fingers. His uncle was alive? But how about the call to the shipyard? His uncle had not been there. How about the call to Mr. Richards? Frank had not attended lodge. Markham had said he had.

TURNING with quick decision, Julie dashed up the stairs. He could still get to the shipyard in time for the afternoon shift. That would settle this ridiculous business definitely. He planned what he would say to his uncle:

"I was certainly relieved when the police called. What on earth happened to you last night?"

But Julie never said anything like that to his uncle. Frank was not at the shipyard. No one had seen him that day.

Julie's mind floundered in an abyss of unanswerable questions. He thought he would go back to the police. "My uncle isn't at the shipyard," he would tell them. "He didn't go—"

The truth hit Julie like a slap in the face. If he asked the police too many questions about Frank, would they not finally also question him? Who was with Frank Punroe last? Who had last seen him alive? Certainly it would

be unwise for Julie to say more to the police. He was happy to have them out of it.

Julie went home. "Dinner will be ready shortly," Markham said. "Tell your uncle to come down." Markham stared at him vacantly.

Julie went upstairs. He tapped on Frank's door. There was no answer. Shortly, Markham called them both for dinner.

Julie entered the dining room. Three places were set. Markham did not speak to Julie, but he *was* talking with Frank.

"Do you agree, Frank, that most any belief may become imbedded in a human brain and that the person may remain sane in spite of the conviction being decidedly unorthodox and unusual?"

Julie put down his fork and stared incredulously at Markham. The man was crazy. Frank was not sitting at the table. After a few seconds in which Markham faced the plate across the table exactly as if Frank were answering, the servant rejoined with:

"You incline to the belief, then, that a deeply imbedded conviction which is so unorthodox as to be beyond reasonable belief, actually constitutes the beginning of insanity?"

Julie interrupted almost violently. "Markham! Are you crazy? Frank is not sitting there. He is not answering you."

Markham turned. That same vacant expression was in his eyes, an expression of mixed sympathy and alarm. "I am afraid, Julie, you are losing your mind."

Had Iner Markham been less calm, less reserved, less convincing in his manner, Julie might not have been convinced that Markham was insane. But the strain of the day had been great. Julie's desire for food left him. A sudden sickness struck his stomach. He rose and rushed up the stairs to the bathroom, retching violently. He became intensely ill and suddenly he was sure of it. Iner Markham was crazy. The police were crazy. Julie Frederick

was fast becoming the only sane man in a town full of lunatics.

The next day Jule found his uncle's wrecked car in a garage. No one had been there about having it fixed. "You might as well buy a new one," the attendant told Jule.

He spent another half day at the shipyard. At quitting time the foreman told him, "You've been acting mighty queerly lately. We can't take chances here. I'm afraid we can't use you any longer."

Jule ate another dinner with an insane man and a ghost. He became ill again. The delusion returned that he was a sane man living in a world of lunatics.

Within ten days Jule was out of money. Because he had no proof of Frank's death he could not ask to be appointed administrator of the estate. Neither was Frank alive so he could ask him for money. He had lost his job and certainly could not ask help from Markham. What could Jule do?

He became desperate. Each evening he witnessed the absurd and impossible situation of Markham talking to a man who wasn't there at dinner time. Jule lost weight. His face grew thin. He had repeated stomach attacks and his body grew emaciated.

Then one night Markham called Jule to dinner. He also called Frank as he usually did. Jule entered the dining room. The table was set for three. Markham was talking with Frank as usual.

Jule screamed aloud.

Frank was sitting at the table. He was talking to Markham and he looked exactly as he had always looked. When Jule screamed, Frank looked up in astonishment. "What's the matter, Jule? Are you ill?" Frank leaped forward to support his nephew's weaving form.

Jule tottered. His eyes rolled. His legs became like rubber. "Where've you been since the accident?" he shouted. Those words expressed the last coherent thinking of a failing mind.

Frank said, "Accident? What accident?"

Jule screamed. He laughed and laughed and laughed. His rolling eyes would no longer be still. The next morning he was taken off to an asylum.

FRANK PUNROE and Iner Markham again sat at dinner. "Insanity seems a cruel punishment even for a murderer," Frank said.

Markham smiled more broadly than was usual. "You are alive only by the greatest of good fortune," he reminded. "Not more than one time in a hundred could a man be thrown through the windshield, then on through both open doors of a box-car without being seriously hurt."

"True," Frank agreed. "But is it not true that, in every crime of this kind, the unusual and the unbelievable is more the rule than the exception?"

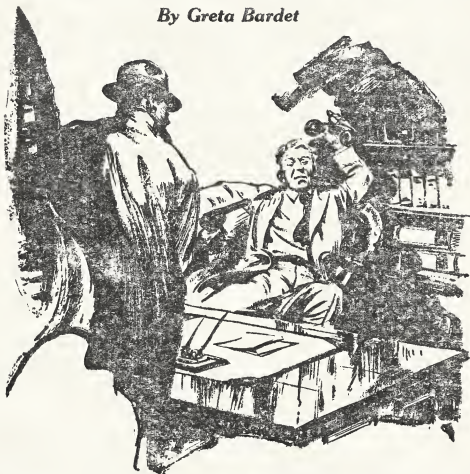
"Such is the history of crime," Markham agreed. "It is fortunate that you had made it a deep study. That was the only reason you could face facts coldly and with realism. As soon as Jule opened the throttle and you saw the freight car ahead, you suspected the motive. When he leaped out after jamming the throttle, you had complete confirmation."

"Yes," Frank answered unemotionally. "I have no regrets. As soon as I picked myself up on the far side of the train I realized what I was up against. I could not hope to convince the police of Jule's homicidal intent. Even if I could have done so, the punishments for attempted crimes are entirely inadequate. I should never have enjoyed a peaceful or safe moment as long as Jule lived.

"That was why I telephoned you at once. Every one of your suggestions were good. They have worked out as you expected and the theories we have proved will doubtless form the foundation for a better book than *Tendencies to Crime*. You are a good actor, Iner."

Murder Is My Middle Name

By Greta Bardet



Bill Brande's morgue business had slumped to nothing and he was down to his last copper. But though advertising may pay others in silver and gold, when Bill got that free publicity he paid off his ad men in lead.

I WAS in O'Malley's, sitting at the bar, drinking a glass of beer. O'Malley ambled over. He was wiping a glass with a towel. He leaned one elbow on the counter and spoke out of the corner of his mouth:

"Guy was in here the other day lookin' for ye."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Says his name is Small. John B. Small."

I took a sip of beer. "So what?"

O'Malley lifted his fat shoulders, let them drop. "Wanted to know if you hung out here and what sort of guy you was."

O'Malley wasn't looking at me. He just kept rubbing hard at that glass, like it was very important it should shine like a diamond. I reached over and slapped it out of his hand. It crashed against the wall. O'Malley jumped so hard he almost beat the glass to the wall. He went pale and started shaking.

"Take it easy, Bill, will ye?"

"What did you tell him?"

"Nothin', Bill. I don't want no trouble. What should I tell him? I don't know nothin' about you."

"Yeah! And nobody does! That's how I kept out of trouble. Nobody knows nothing about me and nobody ever will."

"He wasn't no cop, Bill. He had a lot of dough. Set 'em up for the house any number of times. A Saturday night, too. He just asks me if you hung around here, and I says, could be, and he asks what kind of a guy are you, and I says, oh, he's a fine guy, a right guy, a swell feller. So I says to him, why? Why you so innerested in Bill Brande? And he don't answer me. I says, what's your name, Buddy, and he says it's Small, John B. Small. And he asks if you come around here a lot, and I says I wouldn't know. Ain't seen you in a long time. So he walks out."

I didn't say anything. I just looked at him, straight in the eyes. Somehow people don't like me looking them straight in the eyes. It makes them nervous. That's why I do it.

"It's the truth, Bill," O'Malley's voice is uneven. "I can't help it if a guy comes in here and asks for you, can I?"

HE MADE the mistake of coming close to the bar again. I reached over, grabbed a fistful of shirt, and slapped him one straight across the mouth. He squealed and said, "No! Please, Bill, don't!"

It was funny the way he looked, but I let him go.

"Next time you don't know me, you never heard of me, see?"

"Yeah, yeah, sure, Bill, sure."

"I don't like people gettin' nosy about me, see?"

I slapped a bill, my last one, down at the bar. He snatched it up quick and hurried to the register. He knows I don't like to be kept waiting. When he put the change down, he said:

"I'm sorry, Bill. Don't you know the guy?"

"Never heard of him!" And I walked out of his cheap dump. I hate joints like O'Malley's. They stink of the nickel and dime trade. Why, there was days when I wouldn't let a strong-arm spray a tommygun at me in a joint like that.

I wondered about that John B. Small though. Maybe it was a mistake and he was looking for the wrong Bill Brande. He better be!

I headed for Solly's dump. Ten blocks north and two blocks east. I walked and hated it. In the old days I'd have taken a cab. Why, I remember back to where I used to ride in limousines. I owned two convertibles once.

I entered the barber shop. There was nobody there except the barbers. I walked to the rear and knocked on the door. The strong-arm man let me in. I told him I wanted in on a poker game. He said there was a hot one going on upstairs.

I headed that way when Solly lamped me. He called out to me and I stopped. I'd sort of messed up a guy in Solly's place last time. I don't like guys who get too gay with my luck. I let him have a broken bottle across the face until it was ribbons. He'll never be the same again! I thought about it and laughed a little inside, remembering how funny he looked.

Solly came up nice and smiling.

"The boys are playin' for high stakes, Bill. Game's been goin' on for three days."

He rolled a black cigar around in his greasy mouth and kept his eyes on me. I turned a little, but didn't make a move to come down.

"High stakes, huh," I said. In the old days he wouldn't have dared make



a crack about how I didn't have enough dough to sit in on one of his cheap poker games.

He said, "Fred and Boisie are up there with a sucker. And talkin' about suckers, we had one in here the other night. He had a roll, brother, but a roll! We took him for plenty." He rolled that cigar around to the other side of his mouth.

"He was askin' for ye, Bill."

I came down the stairs slow, meeting his eyes every inch of the way. "Yeah?"

"It was nothin'. He just asks me and the boys if we know you. His name's Small. John B. Small. We said we never hoid of you!"

"He was in on a game?"

"Yeah. Fred, Boisie, and Kinnan. You remember Max Kinnan, don't you?"

As if I'd forget Max Kinnan! That greasy little punk.

I walked out of Solly's dump. I didn't like this. It made me sore. I don't like it if a guy I never heard of comes nosing around all the places I

hang out and asks questions about me. And a guy with dough. That ain't good. Max Kinnan and Solly, I wouldn't trust those rats around a worn-out cigar coupon.

I STEPPED into a candy store. I looked through the Manhattan telephone directory. No John B. Small listed. I looked through all the phone books and drew a blank. If he had dough, he'd have a phone. It must be a private listing.

I took the subway, got off at Fourteenth Street, I walked up to Sixteenth street to Kinnan's house. It was a crummy neighborhood, full of screaming kids and garbage cans. Max Kinnan sure lived in a cheap dump. One of those stinkin' furnished room houses. He lived on the third floor, so I climbed. I knocked on the door. He was home.

Max Kinnan used to be Louey Lingle's mouthpiece. Lingle used to be my boss. Lingle was a big-shot during the prohibition era. Our mob was a real organization. Lingle was the only guy I ever liked. He taught me a lot and he was a little like me. Too bad he didn't take his own advice. That's why he's six foot under and I'm still kickin' around.

Lingle got too careless. In those days the newspapers played the rum-runners up big. The publicity went to his head. Funny how such things can change people. And when Lingle stepped from rumrunning into other rackets, too many people were in on the know. It made it too easy for the cops to step in and take over.

That's why I'm fussy that nobody should know anything about me. Not even my name. I've been in the rackets for over fifteen years and the cops haven't even got my fingerprints. That's because I play it smart. I didn't get careless like so many of the other boys, who lost their heads when the dough rolled in. I take care of my own details and protect my own interests always. I'm still smart. The law never

caught up to me, and I'm seeing to it it never does.

Max Kinnan was once sitting pretty, too. You wouldn't believe that a mouthpiece who had a nationwide rep for never losing a case, could come down to living in a furnished room on Sixteenth Street. When repeal came, our gang split up; Louey Lingle got mowed down with police bullets; Kinnan lost his business. He kept going from bad to worse, until now all he does is hit the bottle.

When he opened the door to me, he blinked for a minute, then showed me all his teeth. He slapped me on the back and said he was glad to see me.

After a while he said, "Now that's odd. Couple nights ago I bumped into a lush who wanted to meet you, Brande."

"Yeah?"

"Yes. An all right guy. Just rolling in money. Such pretty money. His name was Small. John B. Small. I told him you might be found at O'Malley's, partaking of—" He stopped. His mouth was shaped to say prunes. I looked at him through half-closed eyes. He went a little sick.

"Now wait a minute, Bill. I didn't tell him anything."

I stepped up to him, grabbed up two fistfuls of his coat, lifted him clean off his feet, and slammed him back against the wall. My voice snarled out, "What did you tell him?"

He trembled and tried to push me away from him. He could hardly use his mouth, it was so dry.

"Nothing, Bill. I swear it. You know I wouldn't spill to a stranger."

"You would if there was dough in it for you. This Small guy seems to be well heeled. Where did you meet him?"

I shook him hard, so that his head bounced off the wall a couple of times.

"At Solly's," he croaked. "He introduced me to him. They let me in on a poker game. He was a good loser. I won a little, see? He just asked me if I knew a guy with plenty on the ball, a guy with guts, and I thought



The Men Who Go to Sea...

YES, those thousands of merchant seamen who bring convoys through need your help . . . for you may be the cause of **THEIR DEATH!** Perhaps, your own son may be among them . . . or your husband, or sweetheart or father . . . or maybe a friend . . . you know, the boy who used to throw your evening paper on the porch around dinner time.

WHY DID AN ENEMY SUB GET HIS SHIP? You say this to yourself as you wonder whether **HIS** ship had ample protection. Stop wondering! Every convoy has excellent protection. Many times our careless and seemingly innocent **TALK** is the reason for **HIS** ship going down. It all happens just like this

In California, a shipyard worker proudly tells his girl, on the way home one night, about a **SHIP**. A man walking nearby overhears the conversation. In Pennsylvania, a couple at a restaurant table talk about a **PORT**, as a waiter serves them. In New York, a man talks about his son, a **SAILOR**, and mentions a **DATE**, as he drives a casual acquaintance home. In a crowded Ohio office building elevator, a few office workers make guesses about a **CARGO**. One worker makes a good guess! **AND THEN . . . AN ENEMY U-BOAT CAPTAIN EARNED AN IRON CROSS!**

The enemy gathers most of its information in small quantities . . . little scraps of our careless talk . . . that can be pieced together into knowledge useful to them and dangerous to us.

Do you talk carelessly? If you do, our merchant seamen might just as well not have the protection our Navy gives them at all, for their ships must be protected by closed lips as well. If you know something, keep it to yourself! If you overhear something—forget it! Repeat nothing! And if you hear someone asking a lot of questions, persistently seeking too much information, report him to the police. Give our men your protection of **SEALED LIPS!**

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of you. He asked me where you could be found and I said, O'Malley's."

"And?"

"Nothing. He asked where you lived, but nobody knows that. That's all, Bill. I swear to you, that's all."

"Where does this Small live?"

"I don't know, Bill. I wasn't interested."

I bounced his fat noggin off the wall a few more times. It made a pleasant hollow sound and he squealed like a pig. After a while, I let him go.

I didn't like this. Kinnan's a rat. He talks too much. It's the lawyer in him. If this John B. Small oiled Kinnan and pushed little greenbacks into his fat fingers, Kinnan would give off with the life history of every client he ever had. Kinnan knew a thing or two I wouldn't care to have anyone know. If he spilled on me, got gay with my past, I'd fix him. I may not have dough, but I still pack a rod. And I still know how to use it. You can scare more people with a rod than with dough anyway.

I chewed it over for a while. Then I decided that since this Small guy expected me to hang around O'Malley's, I'd oblige. I'd go there and wait around. If he turns up, I'll take a look at him. And he better not be a cop. I can smell a cop any shape, any size they got, a mile off.

But this Small couldn't be a cop. They don't work with dough. And the cops don't even know I exist. So, who the hell is this John B. Small? And what the hell does he want of me?

THE minute I walked into O'Malley's, he came to me on the double.

"Bill, there's been a phone call for ye," he said like he was telling me prohibition was back. "It's this Small guy I think, even though he wouldn't give his name. He said he'd call back in an hour." He looked up at the wall clock. "That was just about an hour ago."

I ordered a glass of his lousy beer. Three minutes later the phone rang. I went to answer it.

"Bill Brande?"

"Yeah."

"This is Mr. Small, John B. Small. I don't believe you've ever heard of me. I live at..." and he gives his address. "I'm sure this is an imposition," he said, "but I want you to hop a cab and come to see me."

"What for?"

"I must talk to you," and he hung up.

I'll kill that guy for keeping me in suspense like that! I never heard of him, how d'ya like that! Hop a cab, he says, come up and see me. Giving me orders! Just like that! I ought to bust his face in just for reminding me I didn't have the price of a cab fare to the corner. I had a good mind not to go, but I was curious. It better be good or else.

He lived in a pretty high-class apartment hotel. Doormen, bell hops, the works. I didn't like this John B. Small some more.

I don't know what it was I expected this Small to look like, small maybe like his name, but he didn't turn out to be like that. A butler let me in and led me to his den. He was seated behind a desk. He had a nice face, the kind you call honest and open, I think. He had thin white hair, prematurely white, because he still looked pretty young. And then again he looked old, I don't know. He looked like a nice nobody.

He asked me to be seated; the butler brought me a drink and cigarettes.

"Y'know," Small said after he looked at me for a while. "I am delighted. Yes, delighted that you came to see me. It was very nice of you. And I must confess, I'm rather thrilled to meet a man of such importance in your rather—er—quaint profession."

I thought he was kidding me. But he wasn't. He meant that. It made me feel a little better.

I said, "Okay, can the rose water. What d'ya want?"

He cleared his throat, loosened his tie a fraction.

"I—er—want you to kill a man for me."

I just stared at him. You could of struck me down with a cap pistol. I couldn't believe I'm hearing right. I had figured a lot of angles on this guy, but this was one I never even brushed on. I couldn't think of anything to say, so I said, "What the hell?"

He looked at me anxiously. "You *do* kill people, don't you? I mean—well, you see, I've been associating with various members of the—er—under-world, asking around for a man of talent. Guts, nerve. I need someone to—er—kill someone for me. Not knowing how to contact that sort of person, I went around—er—shall we say shopping? Amusing term that, shopping for a killer. Do you mind?"

"Who, me?"

He cleared his throat, fingered his tie again.

"After listening to this and that, I heard of you. I followed you up and found you to be the man most admirably suited for the job I have in mind."

"Ya don't say!" I looked at him through half-closed eyes, but it didn't scare him. He sort of smiled back, like he thought I was funny. But I guess I must be making a mistake, because he didn't look like a guy who would be crazy enough to laugh at me.

"I'm just an ordinary business man," he continued, "and I expect to stay that way. I don't care to commit a crime, but being a hypocrite, I don't mind being responsible for one. I can't stand the sight of blood."

"That's tough," I said. "Very tough. But what makes you think—"

He didn't let me finish. "You see, Mr. Brande, it is imperative that I dispose of a dangerous rival."

Dispose of a business rival. That sounded like home territory. He said it in good American maybe, but I knew what he meant. Why, I could remember the days when we disposed of business rivals by the wholesale.



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"You got your nerve," I said to him. "I don't know you from Adam, yet you sit there and ask me to cancel a guy who's in your way. You got the wrong number, bud, I'm no hood."

"But I'm quite willing to pay you for it."

"No kiddin'!" I made it real sarcastic, because I didn't want him to think I was altogether ignorant and couldn't see a simple thing like that myself.

"Please don't be offended at my bluntness. I did a great deal of questioning concerning you. Most people were reluctant to talk. They seemed to be in fear of you."

I took out my penknife, began cleaning my nails.

"Some of them didn't mind talking—which was foolish of them, I will admit. But, I took advantage of them with liquor and with money, so you mustn't blame them."

"Sure, sure."

"I was told you were a man of steel. That you have no police record. No crime was ever laid to your door. You were once very wealthy, but now needed money."

This guy was a honey!

"They tell me you've had a most colorful career. You like fights for the sheer pleasure of seeing your opponent suffer. You avoid liquor and women. You were the right hand man of Louey Lingle, a notorious gangster. You were actively associated in all sorts of illicit trades. Rumrunning. Dope. Lottery. All along down the line to the more recent affiliations of one racket or another. It's amazing!"

"Yeah? Nuts!"

"I'm speaking, of course, of during Louey Lingle's lifetime. After his death you seemed to have become an aimless wanderer looking for another berth. And in all these years of crime, nothing was ever proved against you." He shook his head. "You're a genius."

"Nuts!"

"They speak highly of your loyalty to Louey Lingle. They told me the most colorful stories of you two. One of them in particular, happened three

or four years ago, in which Mr. Lingle seems to have gotten in a bit of a jam. He killed a man in a drunken brawl. It was in a nightclub. There was a witness, Mr. Kinnan tells me, a Mrs. Shelley, I think was the name he mentioned.

"This witness had to be silenced somehow. And you did this in a simple and effective manner. You went to her home, shot her and her son, and Mr. Lingle was free to go. No one saw you come, no one saw you go.

"Shortly after that, however, Mr. Lingle got into a real jam. Mr. Kinnan could do nothing for him. The government seemed to feel that Lingle hadn't been giving them the proper amount of tax from his profits and rightly so. Mr. Lingle got bail. He skipped bail. The police found him. Mr. Lingle was sensitive, quick on the draw, so he preferred to shoot it out. Five policemen were killed, I understand, but they got Mr. Lingle anyway. He died."

"So it goes," I said, "so it goes."

"Since Louey Lingle's death, you've made little use of your talents. If you have, no one seems to know about it. So you see, when I first heard of you, I became interested; later on, I knew you were the man I wanted. I need a man of courage, nerves of steel, and a man who appreciates the color of money."

He opened the top desk drawer, reached in and drew out a bundle of bills.

"This is five hundred dollars, Mr. Brande."

I curled up my mouth.

"But this is just on account. And it will not be the end of your earnings. After you have disposed of my business rival, there will be another five hundred. And I can promise you more money after that."

"Say, what's your racket anyway?"

HE SMILED wisely. "I believe we are known as black markets. But I don't deal in anything as small as

cuts of beef or silk stockings for the ladies. No, I deal in bigger things. We sell many things to certain South American concerns. This material in turn is sold to Germany and Japan. I won't bore you with details, but that's my racket and you're in if you want."

Like I say, he said it in good American, but I got the idea. I liked it.

"Look," I said, "I'm not saying anything, see? I think you're off your feed to ask me like this. But who's the guy you want cancelled?"

"Man by the name of Edward Curran. He lives at the Rossington Apartments uptown. Apartment 2-B. He is tallish, has an abundant crop of curly black hair, a large nose, wears horn-rimmed spectacles all the time. That is, I have never seen him without them. He has very heavy black eyebrows that grow out of the bridge of his nose. He lives entirely alone and has no other interests except closing down my business. He's patriotic and seems to think—well, no matter. Is this enough for you?"

"Could be."

He put the money down, reached into that desk drawer again. He came up with a key this time.

"This is the key to his apartment. I've made everything very simple for you, Bill, haven't I? All you have to do is to go there and—bump him off, hey?" He chuckled at that.

I shook my head. "You're unsmart, Small, very unsmart. You overlooked details."

His face fell. "Oh? Well, naturally. This is your business, not mine. I realize full well I'm out of my element here. If there is anything I've overlooked, I knew you'd be clever enough to tell me about it."

"I wouldn't tell you a lousy thing! Any details I take care of in my own way. I protect my interests first, last, and always, see? You're the one who takes the responsibility for anything going wrong, brother, not me!"

"I see. That's how you've kept out of trouble, hey?" He shrugged. "So

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be it. If you're going to kill Curran for me, I should like it done as quickly as possible. Tonight, if possible. There is little time to lose."

I didn't answer. I just rose from the chair.

"You'll do it?"

I didn't answer that either. I reached down, took up the money, pocketed it, and walked out.

DOWNSTAIRS I flagged a cab. I told him to go to Sixteenth Street. It was a nice feeling having dough in my pockets again. I got off at Fifth Avenue and walked down Sixteenth to Kinnan's dump.

I walked up to the third floor. When I came to his room, I put my ear against the door. I could hear movements inside. I bent down, pressed my eye to the keyhole. I had to make sure it was Kinnan inside. It was.

I straightened, walked down to the end of the hallway. I put a nickel in the pay telephone and dialed Solly's number.

When I got the connection, I asked for Solly. After a while he answered.

"Solly?" I said, "This is Kinnan." I could imitate voices in a pinch. "Listen, Solly, come down to my place. Rush. Got a little business to talk over."

"Look," said Solly, "I ain't got the time. Bother me some other day."

"I can't. John B. Small is here. He wants we should earn a piece of change. A grand apiece."

"Huh?"

"Can't talk now, Solly. So hurry over, will ye?"

I hung up. I waited. About a minute later the phone rang. I let it ring twice, then answered. It was Solly.

"Look, Solly," I said, "Will you, for the love o' Mike, quit horsin' around, or don't you need a grand?"

"Oh, sure, sure, I just— Okay, be right over!"

I hung up again. I found the bathroom for the floor. I went inside, shut, and locked the door after me. I sat down, smoked, listened, and waited.

It took Solly eleven minutes, which wasn't bad. I heard him come up. I opened the bathroom door a crack and watched. I saw him swing around the lannister and head for Kinnan's room. I slipped out from behind the door and followed right after him, not making a sound. It was too dark to attract his attention anyway.

He knocked on the door. A minute later, Kinnan said, "Who is it?"

"It's me, Solly."

I let him have the butt of my gun over his skull. It went *thunk* and he sank to the floor. The door opened and Kinnan stuck his kisser out. He looked at me, then down at Solly. He made a funny noise deep down in his throat and hopped backwards into his room.

"What's this?" he wanted to know. "What's this?" He was slightly drunk.

I pushed my hand down into Solly's shoulder holster and got his gun. Then I put my hand around his collar and dragged him across the threshold like he was a bag of mush. I shut the door after us, stood with my back against it. I held up the gun, released the safety, and said, "Hi, Pal."

KINNAN had gone as white as paper. All his fat shook like a machine gun in action. He kept eying my gun. "What's the m-m-matter with Solly?"

"He's got a little headache."

He made a useless motion with his hands. "Anything wrong, Bill—?"

"Yeah!"

He was one scared piece of lard all right. His frightened eyes lifted to mine, trying to read my thoughts.

I said it slow, real slow.

"You—talk—too—much!"

Terror shot through his face. "Now, take it easy. Please, Bill. You don't have to get sore—about S-s-s-small. He's a right guy."

"I know."

His head jerked once. "You do?"

"Sure. Still—you shouldn't 'a' ought 'a' said what you said, Pal."

"But, Bill—I didn't mean anything—"

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"Sure. I ain't kickin' about the guy you spilled to. He's okay. I like him. But—he could 'a' been a cop, see what I mean?"

"But he isn't, Bill, he isn't!"

"I know, but that ain't the point, sweetheart. The point is, you talked. That was unsmart, Kinnan."

Some of the sweat on his forehead started running down his face. He didn't seem to feel it. "Lemme think, Bill, please, lemme think—"

"You didn't have to shoot the works about me, Kinnan. You were Louey Lingle's mouthpiece. Only you and Lingle knew it was me slugged that witness. Lingle's dead. That leaves only you and me who know. It ain't you're telling Small that I mind, see? But—you may talk again someday. And I don't take chances! No cop ever touched me. I hate to pay for a couple rotten killin's at this late date, because a rotten drunk shyster like you couldn't keep his trap buttoned."

He started backing away. His eyes glued in terror on my rod. His mouth was working, but nothing but hoarse squeaks got past his lips. He hit up against an overstuffed chair. He tried to keep right on backing up. He made a funny little noise like a sobbing laugh. I could see his vocal cords working up a scream.

I shot him once between the eyes and once in the guts. He lurched forward and was dead by the time he dropped to the floor. I watched him for a minute, then I went up to him and kicked his face in.

Nobody talks about me. He had it coming to him.

Solly groaned. I stepped up to him and kicked his face once. Then I went around the room, upset things, made it look like a fight. When I was through I slipped the rod back into Solly's hand and left.

I went down to the phone in the hall. I put in my nickel, dialed police

headquarters. I reported that I had heard a fight, and something that might have been a shot from a Maxim. I gave the address, the room number, and slapped down the receiver. I beat it.

SO THAT'S that. Busy day. Sort of like old times. I like being busy. It was nine-thirty. I had to laugh to myself though. Here this afternoon I was down in the dumps, because I hadn't been working lately. And here it is like old times, doing what I had to do, and letting somebody else take the rap.

Like I said to Small, I took care of all the details myself. I didn't want these two jerks spilling that Small had been around asking questions about me. I like to plug up all possible leaks.

I took the subway uptown. I didn't want to take a cab. The cabby might have a memory.

The Rossington Apartments proved to be a fairly decent apartment house. Middle class stuff. There's no one around to see me, which is lucky. I looked at the bells in the lobby, found Ed. Curran, 2-B.

I took out my can openers and let myself into the hallway. I climbed to the second floor. There wasn't a soul around. Nothing but smells and noises. I put the key Small gave me in the lock. Then I turned the knob and slid the door open an inch.

It was dark inside, so I hurried open the door, stepped through, and, making sure there was no one in the hallway, I shut it.

I waited in the darkness. It was a big apartment. To my right I saw a faint glow of light underneath a door. I could hear a voice, too, talking. By the pauses I knew he was talking on the phone. I couldn't hear what was said, so I hurried over there. The thick rugs hid my footsteps.

I went to the door with the light under it and put my ear close to the wood. I heard the faint click of a receiver dropping in the cradle and a

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chair being scraped across the floor.

By the faintness of the glow underneath the door, I knew there wasn't much light inside. I put my hand around the knob, turned slowly. When it stopped, I carefully inched open the door.

When the door was open about four inches, I could see the guy. He was standing by a desk, the light of a desk lamp falling on his face. He had a pipe in his mouth and was lighting a long wooden match on an ashtray.

I opened the door, swung through, and shut it noiselessly behind me. I stood there in the semi-darkness and looked at my dead man.

The description fit all right. He was tall, with curly black hair, thick black eyebrows growing right out of his nose, horn-rimmed specs, and a large nose. He didn't hear me, so I just stood there waiting. It was nice looking at a corpse. I had my rod ready in my hand for the job.

But I was wrong. He had heard me, for I knew he knew I was in the room. His hands gave him away. As he held the match to the pipe, they were trembling, and I could see that tense expression on his face. His eyes were staring down at his desk. He was trying hard not to look at me. He was scared silly.

It was funny then, standing there, knowing I was going to kill him, while his mind was racing desperately for roads of escape. I'm death and I'm power.

I WATCHED the match flame suck in and out as he drew light onto his tobacco. The flame was almost to his fingers. He had to fan it out. He reached over to the ash tray in a slow deliberate movement and dropped it. His hand slid back toward the phone.

"Don't waste your time," I said, and my voice sounded hard and cold in the room. He dared to lift his eyes to me. We stood there like that, just looking at each other.

He had the screwiest look on his

face. I couldn't read it. It was fear and yet it wasn't. It was as if he were very old and seemed to accept the fact that I was death and was standing there waiting for him. It made me go hot and cold all over and made the breath in my lungs get lumpy. It is fun being death.

"Sorry, brother," I said, "but you're in the way. This is a little present from John B. Small."

So I let him have it. Once between the eyes, once in the stomach. He fell against the desk, as blood slid down his face. I took a good aim at his heart and let him have it before he slumped over the desk. It lifted him clear off his feet.

I like to make sure they're dead before they hit the floor. It's sort of professional pride with me.

This sure was an easy way to earn a grand. And there would be more dough from now on. I slipped my rod back into the holster. A body slapped up against me in the back. My arms were pinned to my sides. Someone shouted. The lights were lit. Cops flooded into the room.

It was so unexpected, like as if I'd been punched below the belt. A pile driver pounded a sickness through me. For the first time, cops—

It's all kind of mixed up in my brain. They took my rod. It was all so funny. But I wasn't laughing at all. I wasn't mad either. It's hard to explain.

The sickness I felt at first went away and then there was nothing inside. I heard the cops talking. It seems this Curran had photo-electric eyes all over his apartment. He could tell by a small board on his desk if anyone entered the apartment. A mere detail.

The cops told me about the dead man's telephone call to police headquarters. He had said someone was in the house. He felt sure the person was coming to kill him. He said he had an enemy. He feared for his life. The cops had hurried over.

I remembered that when I entered

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